Industrial Worker

OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF THE INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

December 2005 #1680 Vol. 102 No. 11 $1.00 / 75 p

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Right to strike to go?

Australian workers fight government scheme to 'Americanize' labour relations

BY CHRIS WHITE

More than 500,000 workers joined protests across Australia Nov. 15, protesting new legislation that sharply curtails workers rights in order to encourage individual "agreements" between workers and bosses. This article was written on the eve of those protests:

One of the hallmarks of the police state is the loss of the right to strike. The right to withdraw labour is the one thing that distinguishes a free worker from the slave. But today this right is under attack in Australia.

There are many concerns with the recently approved WorkChoices (WC) legislation. I only deal with how Prime Minister Howard has set out to (almost) extinguish the limited right to strike for workers.

Howard's WC legislation was rushed through Parliament to hide repressive changes. There are new penal powers and sanctions against striking workers, particularly in what the government deems "essential services." Public sector workers are barred from striking under the new laws, but the Minister of Labour will also now have the power to extend "essential services" cover to any firm.

"Blueing" is to be even more risky. Will the Australian "blue" (sick out) become an endangered species? Workers and their unions in dispute, those "blueing," will be liable to be ordered back to work, fined, sued and even criminalised.

This anti-labour legislation was pushed through even though Australia is going through a low strike era. Howard did not raise these further restrictions on the right to strike during the election. Instead, after the election corporate associations lobbied Minister Andrews to take away the protections necessary for the effective right to strike.

A high-priced government ad campaign says: "We won't take away the right to strike" but this is spin. In addition to the expansion of "essential services" cover, new provisions severely restrict basic union rights for industrial action for industry or pattern bargaining. There will be no right to strike outside of the single enterprise.

Third persons affected by industrial action (other than the employer and unions in the dispute) will be allowed to go to court to halt protected legal industrial action. Unions will be barred from pursuing claims that encourage unionism.

The Australian Industrial Relations Commission, which will be gutted of its 100-year-old responsibility to settle disputes, will be given new powers to halt unprotected industrial action. Employers can more easily go to the courts for injunctions to halt industrial action. Employers retain their power to easily lock-out workers.

Compulsory secret ballots will have to be conducted before industrial action is taken. (They had been voluntary.) The new requirements are so complex that it will be quite difficult to implement a valid ballot. In practice this will severely restrict protected action in enterprise bargaining. There is no requirement for employers to ballot shareholders before locking out their workforce.

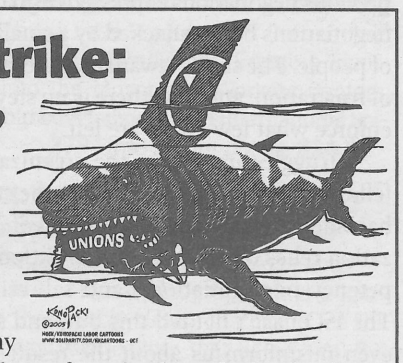
All industrial action will be prohibited during the life of an agreement. And employers will no longer be required to approach the AIRC before taking unions to court. The previous rule called for 72 hours of conciliation in the Industrial Relations Commission to settle the grievances.

The Howard government outlawed the right to strike for construction unions in legislation slammed through in August. A new

continued on page 9

Northwest Airlines strike:

Where is U.S. labor going?



BY PETER RACHLEFF

The Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association strike at Northwest Airlines offers a window into class relations and the state of the labor movement in the United States. What we can see through that window is very grim. As key sectors of the U.S. economy continue to struggle with overcapacity, workers are being forced to bear the burden by a ruling elite which is unwilling to give up its perquisites and privileges. The lion's share of productivity increases in the past two decades have gone to capital, while workers have faced wage cuts, higher health care costs, reduced benefits, disappeared pensions, rewritten work rules, and economic insecurity. Unions have been unable to mount an effective counteroffensive against this onslaught, let alone an effective defense.

On August 19, 4,400 mechanics, cleaners and custodians, members of AMFA, walked off the job at Northwest Airlines facilities, primarily in Minneapolis and Detroit, with smaller units in San Francisco, Boston, New York, Memphis and Atlanta. The convoluted clock of the Railway Labor Act's "mediation" process had ticked down to zero hour, and the Bush administration had announced that it would not intervene. (In this deregulated industry, the government continues to regulate labor, as a railroad engineer friend of mine has bitterly pointed out too many times.)

NWA's final offer included the right to contract out 53 percent of the mechanics' work and all of the custodians' and cleaners' work, a 26 percent wage reduction, cutting sick days and vacations, work rule changes, and the transformation of a pension plan that was more than thirty years old from defined benefit to a 401(k). Management insisted that they needed $176 million per year (raised – or is that "lowered"? – to $203 million three weeks into the strike) in "cost savings" from AMFA's members as part of their larger target of $2.3 billion per year from all its workers. The mechanics, cleaners and custodians felt that they had no choice. If they accepted the contract, more than half would lose their jobs while the survivors would face conditions that many said they would never be willing to work under. And so they struck.

AMFA is a small union which only in recent years has been chosen by mechanics to represent them at major airlines. It has a small treasury and no strike fund. It is not affiliated with the AFL-CIO and has little connection with other unions. But AMFA members, particularly the mechanics, were confident that NWA could not run effective operations without them. Not only were their skills, licenses and certificates of value, but they felt that their informal knowledge of their airline's planes, rules and practices made them irreplaceable. With the other NWA unions – the largest being the independent Professional Flight Attendants Association, the baggage handlers and ticket agents represented by the International Association of Machinists, and the Airline Pilots Association – facing demands for major concessions, AMFA hoped for significant support, perhaps even sympathy strikes (legal in industries

***Northwest:** continued page 6*

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Industrial Worker
PO Box 13476
Philadelphia, PA 19101

ISSN 0019-8870

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

Periodicals Postage
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Philadelphia, PA
and additional
mailing offices

Wal-Mart calls for raising minimum wage

Faced with increasing difficulty selling its cut-rate goods to hard-pressed U.S. workers, Wal-Mart recently called on Congress to raise the minimum wage so that workers can afford to shop at its stores.

The company also announced it would adopt more environmentally friendly practices and introduce a new lower-cost health plan for its workers, thousands of whom rely on welfare programs because they can not afford health coverage on Wal-Mart wages. The new, cheaper plan would come with a $1,000 annual deductible – a hefty sum for the average U.S. Wal-Mart worker, who makes less than $19,000 a year. At the same time, an internal Wal-Mart memo discussed ways to hold down its health care and other benefit costs by hiring more part-time workers and avoiding hiring unhealthy workers.

In early November, a Wal-Mart public relations flack was caught trying to make a bootleg copy of filmmaker Robert Greenwald's new documentary, "Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price." Perhaps it would have cost too much to buy a copy through normal channels.

Wal-Mart says it will now press to bring Chinese factories up to U.S. environmental standards. "China actually has very good environmental and safety standards on the books," says Beth Keck, Wal-Mart's director of international corporate affairs. But Wal-Mart didn't shift production to China because of its safety standards, or the respect for workers' rights also written into its statutes. Rather, they went there knowing that any worker who agitated for better wages, safer conditions or less pollution faced arrest and imprisonment.

Researchers at a Wal-Mart sponsored conference Nov. 4 reported that the company's ruthless price cutting had forced other retailers to follow suit, holding down the Consumer Price Index by 3.1 percent over 19 years. But while economic forecasting firm Global Insight said the savings resulted from efficiencies such as its advanced distribution network, rather than from low wages, other economists found that the retail giant was hurting workers across the entire economy.

A study of nationwide payroll data by David Neumark of the Public Policy Institute of and two other economists found that after Wal-Mart opened in a county, total earnings per worker, retail and nonretail, fell 2.5 to 4.8 percent. One reason for the decline, he said, is that Wal-Mart pressures its suppliers to cut their costs, leading to lower wages for the suppliers' workers.

Meanwhile, despite years of effort the UFCW has so little support among Wal-Mart workers that it has been forced to turn to auto-dialers to reach out to workers, with computers trying to persuade them to join its new Wal-Mart Workers Association by offering a chance in a health care benefits raffle.

"Socialists" give in to bosses

Many party groups on the left are seen at political allies, and often they have something interesting to say about U.S. policy. Unfortunately, some of them do not organize as well as they speak.



The *Socialist Worker,* the weekly tabloid heartily distributed by members of the International Socialist Organization (U.S.), published an article about contract negotiations at Madison Market Coop in Seattle with UFCW local 21. Based upon their track record over the past 10 years, it is not surprising that ISO would claim credit for the work of others, but in this case, they are talking about things that didn't happen at all. The reason this is of concern to us is because the IWW represents workers with the same employer.

The article, "Activism Wins Gains at Madison Market" (Oct. 14, by Darrin Hoop), doesn't mention that the negotiating committee missed being recalled by just one vote. Nor does it mention the serious curtailment of workers' free speech rights and the right to honor others' picket lines – picketing is barred at all times, a strike cannot be honored unless UFCW #21 approves first and gives the coop 24 hours notice, and the union is now obligated to prevent workers (who would be fired under the contract) from engaging in these important, hard-won rights. This kind of language is what creates the conditions for union leaders to force members to scab on other unions. The writer of the article also does not mention that he was a member of the negotiating committee.

The committee also gave away the right to negotiate on past practice issues and other benefits not explicit in the contract by accepting a restrictive management rights clause. This was replaced by a "staff council" of elected employees. This council's recommendations are not binding, as management can simply declare a policy "operational" and implement it without input from the council or negotiating with the union. The council previously had binding power to formulate operational policies under the past practice. The loss of this right is a large concession in exercising worker power.

The raises were not generous. For those making around $9 per hour, the next yearly raise is 2.7 percent, or 25 cents; for those making around $15, the next raise is 1.6 percent, or 24 cents an hour. When accounting for inflation and rising fuel prices, this is a wage cut. Employees who received any sort of merit raise saw their retro pay signed away. Retro pay was a big issue because it took over a year to get a vote on a first proposal. The contract expired in August 2004, and the committee formed in March of that year – 18 months ago. Even at 25 cents an hour, that's $500 for a year.

The previous contract in 2002 got workers 5 percent raises, increased health care benefits including new benefits for partners and children, shift bidding based on seniority, and several hundred dollars in retro pay for everyone. That contract was approved by 95 percent of the workers, under the threat of a strike. Negotiations were well attended, and worker meetings were frequent. The employer was hostile and hired union buster Braun Consulting. The negotiators and the shop steward were all dual card IWW members.

Why the contrast? Because the ISO clique in the shop campaigned to have their "opponents" fired, used physical intimidation, verbal harassment and rumors to intimidate them, and alienated senior employees from union activism. When the contract expired last year, there was a void due to this and employee turnover for them to step into and hand-pick their committee (there was no election due to lack of interest). They pitted new workers against senior workers in order to obfuscate their role as wreckers, and harassed people who showed interest in joining the IWW as dual carders. They went public without consulting the rest of the staff, but never organized their co-workers. A worker who was not in the circle had to go to a former steward to help win their job back. The ISO dominated the process, while a small handful of workers desperately tried to make it work, and the majority of employees sat out. Management had a field day.

As a result, workers who "won" these "gains" had to go to union officials to get copies of the proposals, because the committee refused to furnish them. Workers initiated a recall, which lost by one vote out of nearly 80 workers, because only those voting for the recall were required to even cast a ballot (all ballots cast were "recall" votes) – hardly a vote of confidence. Many employees, especially those who had been active in the previous negotiations expressed dismay at the negotiations being hijacked by a small group of people. The shop steward quit the store out of frustration, and now there is no steward to enforce what few rights are left.

Struggles are won by the organization of fellow workers on the job, when the struggle becomes their struggle. This kind of organization relies on trust, communication, competency in negotiations, and self-criticism. The ISO hasn't figured this out, and so they even misinform us about the result of this ignorance in their newspaper. Add this to the stack of stories on how the left eats itself.

x337969, Seattle

Property and theft

The right to the ownership and enjoyment of private property is a venerable tenet of the social contract dating back to the very origins of Anglo-Saxon common law. Indeed, the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution specifies that no one may be deprived of their property "without due process of law," and that private property can not "be taken for public use without just compensation." Following the Fifth Amendment, federal, state and local jurisdictions have been permitted to take over private holdings under the principle of eminent domain, the acquisition and use of private property for projects deemed to be in the public interest, such as military bases, highways, wilderness preserves, etc. The alleged benefits to the community at large must be tangible and precisely defined. This is to ensure, at least theoretically, that Constitutional limits are respected and the basic right of private property not easily infringed. That is, up until now.

If all American citizens have equal rights to property, it is now obvious – as George Orwell observed – that some are simply more equal than others. The multinational Pfizer Corporation, a giant in the pharmaceutical industry, developed plans for the takeover of the residential Fort Trumbull neighborhood in New London, Connecticut, for the construction of a research center, a shopping mall and upscale condominiums. Pfizer promised the New London city council that tax revenues would soar once the neighborhood was bulldozed and their facilities installed. In haste to cash in, the city handed over powers of eminent domain to the New London Development Corp. – a private body controlled by Pfizer. The residents were told to clear out. Led by homeowner Susette Kelo, outraged residents argued to keep their property in court, appealing eventually to the highest

Correction

Steven Horvath was incorrectly listed last issue, in our In November We Remember feature, as having been killed in 1908. The McKees Rocks strike he was killed during occurred in 1909.

Industrial Worker

The Voice of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism

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Official newspaper of the **Industrial Workers of the World**
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Philadelphia PA 19101 USA
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www.iww.org

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ISSN 0019-8870 Periodicals postage paid Philadelphia PA.

Postmaster: Send address changes to: Industrial Worker, POB 13476, Phila. PA 19101 USA

Individual Subscriptions: $15
Library Subs: $20/year
(Member sub included in dues)

Published eleven times per year

Articles not so designated do not reflect the official position of the IWW. Contributions welcome.

Press Date: November 15, 2005

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legal authority in the land.

In a 5-4 decision, the U.S. Supreme Court sided with Pfizer and the light-fingered city authorities. Interestingly enough, the more "liberal" members of the court voted with the majority. (Do the terms "liberal" and "conservative" retain any real meaning so far as the working class is concerned?) In a dissenting opinion, outgoing Justice Sandra Day O'Connor asserted that now the "specter of condemnation hangs over all property. Nothing is to prevent the state from replacing ... any home with a shopping mall." The beneficiaries of this decision, she continued, "would be those of disproportionate influence and power, including large corporations."

Both O'Connor and Clarence Thomas noted that the targets of such expropriation would inevitably be communities of working people, the poor and the elderly, Hispanic and African-American neighborhoods. It's a safe bet that developers have no plans for George Bush's Texas ranch or Teddy Kennedy's compound on Cape Cod.

Joining in support of the New London victims were the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the NAACP, the American Association of Retired Persons, and the Libertarian Party. The effects of directly granting to corporations the power to dispossess citizens and seize power when and where they please are obviously destructive of the basic principles of citizens' rights. Popular reaction has been swift. The House of Representatives has passed a nonbinding resolution opposing the decision. Two dozen state legislatures are designing bills to restrict the power of eminent domain in regard to corporate thievery, and such restrictions have already become law in Delaware and Alabama. Let's hope they're never challenged in the Supreme Court.

To add insult to injury, Pfizer had the hypocrisy to sponsor a Business for Social Responsibility Conference in November, the alleged aim of which was to promote respect for "ethical values, people, communities and the environment." This is the moral equivalent of a heroin dealer sponsoring a Just Say No rally. Evidently, exploitation at the workplace just isn't enough anymore.

The logic of the relentless drive for corporate profits requires the subversion of democratic rights and popular government (such as they are). The Kelo decision is a local result of a global realignment of power – the first fruits of the mega-capitalist new world order in which national laws and local ordinances upholding human rights and environmental protection are regarded as speed bumps on the way to the corporatization of everyday life.

It should be no surprise that a majority on the Supreme Court agreed with Pfizer; who do they work for, after all? The wholesale seizure of property by tyrants was one of the immediate causes of the American Revolution. What's next on the backwards path? Indentured servitude?

Martin Comack, x351621

Teamsters raid on IWW drive fails

On Nov. 1, Local 810 of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters lost an NLRB election for the roughly 300-worker transportation department of New York City internet grocer FreshDirect, LLC. The local had lost an election in 2004 for the same unit. Despite having won the support of over 100 workers who could have been organized into a powerful union presence, Local 810 abandoned the field after that election.

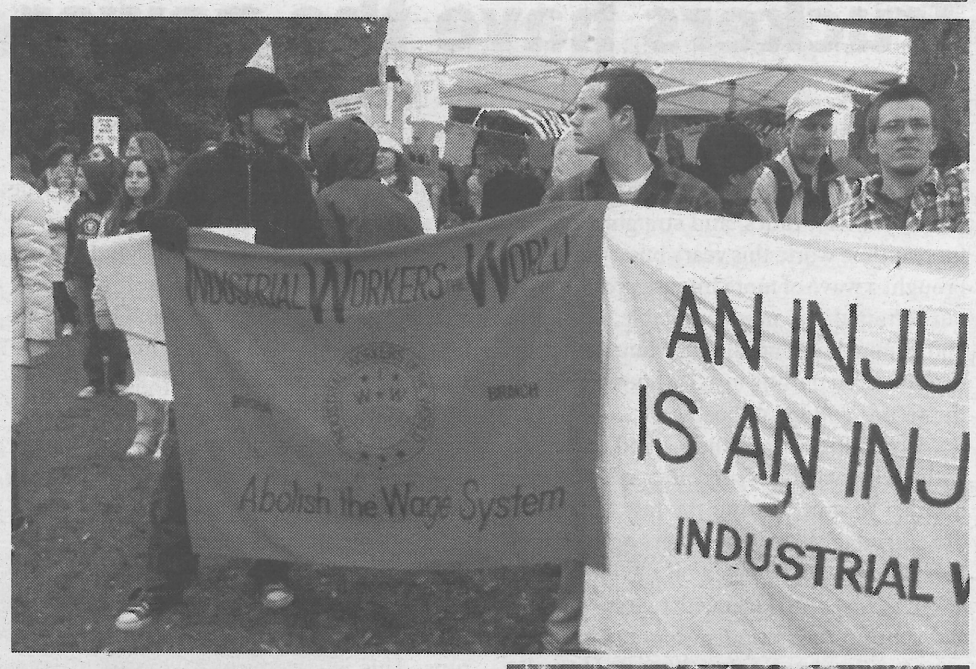
FreshDirect, of course, soon broke the promises it had made during the campaign. Transportation workers grew increasingly dissatisfied, and, in June of this year some of them contacted the IWW's New York City General Membership Branch. New York Wobblies mapped out an ambitious industrial campaign to line up the entire FreshDirect workforce – about 1,200 workers – along with workers in other nearby wholesale and retail foodstuffs establishments. With help from other members of New York's rank-and-file May Day Coalition, the Branch began gathering contacts and agitating for the union.

No sooner had the IWW hit the streets than Local 810 reappeared, having been tipped off by a loyal FreshDirect driver, and began circulating authorization cards. Soon they filed for an election with the local NLRB office, alerting management to the existence of their organizing drive and prompting a tepid anti-union propaganda campaign by the company. IWW organizers continued their campaign regardless, telling transportation workers that they would support whatever decision the workers made. Now that the cat was out of the bag, however, they openly confronted management, agitating publicly in front of the FreshDirect plant and refusing to be driven away by security guards.

The IWW campaign received considerable encouragement from many of the drivers, helpers and runners who make up the FreshDirect transportation department, as well as from workers in other departments. Many transportation workers were attracted by the IWW's democratic structure, low dues, and emphasis on workers' power on the job. These expressed skepticism of the Teamsters, whose organizer showed up only rarely in his black Continental, formed no organizing committee within the department, and failed to hold even a single meeting of workers.

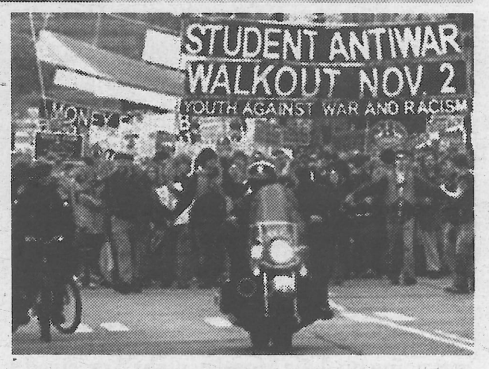
Other transportation workers, however, had the impression that the election was "in the bag" for the Teamsters. As the election neared, workers failed to show up for several scheduled meetings with the IWW. A rumor circulated that the IWW had been paid by FreshDirect to split the ballot and hand management a victory. The IWWs therefore decided to suspend our efforts in the transportation department during the last weeks before the Teamsters election.

The election was held on a Tuesday. Ballots were impounded and were not counted until the next day. The final count was 133 for the Teamsters and 164 for no union, with three void ballots and two challenged ballots. The IWW campaign continues to gain steam in the other departments of FreshDirect, most notably in sortation which assembles grocery boxes for delivery to customers' homes.



Boston Wobblies join anti-war march

Boston IWW members joined a 2,000-person anti-war march and rally Oct. 29, carrying branch banners and IWW flags and talking with several fellow protesters in the Boston Common afterward.
The Boston branch is growing once again, and several members have been joining Northwest Airlines picket lines.



Rank-and-file coalition grows

The New York City GMB is at the heart of a growing informal coalition dedicated to building democratic, worker-run organizations. Other coalition partners are Se Hace Camino al Andar/Make the Road By Walking, the Chinese Staff & Workers Association, the Harlem Tenants' Council, and members of the Million Worker March Movement and the United Electrical Workers.

The coalition, dubbed the May Day Coalition, is the brainchild of IWW member Billy J. Randel. Randel conceived of the idea in connection with efforts to revive the observance of May First as the international workers' holiday here in New York. "We are building a family of workers, supporting each other in the struggle for workers' power on the job and in the community," said Randel.

Recent coalition activities include support of the 318 Restaurant Workers Union, protesting abusive conditions at the Golden Bridge restaurant on the Bowery, an informational picket at Uncle George's restaurant in Queens, where Hispanic workers complain of humiliating mistreatment by the boss, and continuing support for the IWW's campaign to organize the foodstuffs industry in the New York metropolitan area.

Preamble to the IWW Constitution

The working class and the employing class have nothing in common. There can be no peace so long as hunger and want are found among millions of working people and the few, who make up the employing class, have all the good things of life.

Between these two classes a struggle must go on until the workers of the world organize as a class, take possession of the means of production, abolish the wage system, and live in harmony with the earth.

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, "A fair day's wage for a fair day's work," we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, "Abolition of the wage system."

It is the historic mission of the working class to do away with capitalism. The army of production must be organized, not only for the everyday struggle with capitalists, but also to carry on production when capitalism shall have been overthrown. By organizing industrially we are forming the structure of the new society within the shell of the old.

Join the IWW Today

The IWW is a union for all workers, a union dedicated to organizing on the job, in our industries and in our communities both to win better conditions today and to build a world without bosses, a world in which production and distribution are organized by workers ourselves to meet the needs of the entire population, not merely a handful of exploiters.

We are the Industrial Workers of the World because we organize industrially – that is to say, we organize all workers on the job into one union, rather than dividing workers by trade, so that we can pool our strength to fight the bosses together.

Since the IWW was founded in 1905, we have recognized the need to build a truly international union movement in order to confront the global power of the bosses and in order to strengthen workers' ability to stand in solidarity with our fellow workers no matter what part of the globe they happen to live on.

We are a union open to all workers, whether or not the IWW happens to have representation rights in your workplace. We organize the worker, not the job, recognizing that unionism is not about government certification or employer recognition but about workers coming together to address our common concerns. Sometimes this means striking or signing a contract. Sometimes it means refusing to work with an unsafe machine or following the bosses' orders so literally that nothing gets done. Sometimes it means agitating around particular issues or grievances in a specific workplace, or across an industry.

Because the IWW is a democratic, member-run union, decisions about what issues to address and what tactics to pursue are made by the workers directly involved.

TO JOIN: Mail this form with a check or money order for initiation and your first month's dues to: IWW, Post Office Box 13476, Philadelphia, PA 19101.

Initiation is the same as one month's dues. Our dues are calculated according to your income. If your monthly income is under $1,000, dues are $6 a month. If your monthly income is between $1,000 - $2,000, dues are $12 a month. If your monthly income is over $2,000 a month, dues are $18 a month.

- ❑ I affirm that I am a worker, and that I am not an employer
- ❑ I agree to abide by the IWW constitution
- ❑ I will study its principles and make myself acquainted with its purposes.



Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Occupation: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Amount Enclosed: _____

Membership includes a subscription to the Industrial Worker.

Truckers have the power to win

BY PB, WWW.IWW.ORG BLOG

While some problems are universal in LTL (less-than-truckload) trucking, such as mandatory overtime, seniority violations, no lunch or break times, and straight time pay for overtime work, this year's busy season has brought a wave of more intense problems. At our terminal, the most profitable of roughly 250 terminals in a non-union company, workers have been putting in extra hours to handle the record volume of business.

Conditions are getting so bad that many without knowledge of any other solution have decided to quit. During the last two weeks of September three new drivers quit. And on Friday, Sept. 30, I walked off the job.

That weekend I met with two co-workers. We came up with a strategy for my return and subsequent grievance handling. On Monday morning I did not go into work. A supervisor called and asked me what was wrong. I told him I was quitting, and he asked me to reconsider. He called me five minutes after I got off the phone with him and told me the terminal manager was upset and wanted to speak with me. I told him that I would meet with him in person the next day.

All day Monday several co-workers called me to either congratulate me or find out what was going on. Late Monday night, I received a phone call from a co-worker who heard that the terminal manager was going to give me whatever I wanted to get me to come back.

Some of my co-workers talked at work on Monday and gave me instructions on how to handle my meeting with the boss. I put together a list of about 15 problems that the boss needed to solve before I would return to work. These included disrespectful behavior from supervisors, violation of seniority rights, mandatory overtime, inconsistent scheduling, no breaks, no lunches, shortages of equipment (both trucks and forklifts), no pay for pre-trip inspections, and no overtime pay for overtime work.

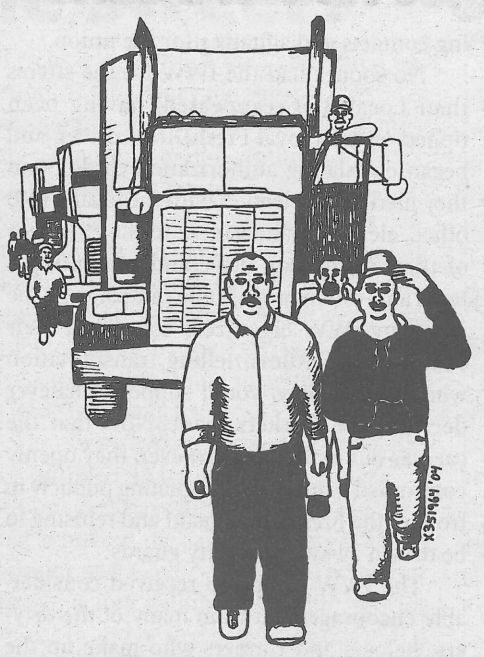
This last problem may need some elaboration. In LTL trucking, there are two types of drivers: P&D (pickup and delivery) and Line Haul drivers. P&D drivers work during the day and are paid hourly for both dock work (loading and unloading trailers) and driving time. Line haul drivers work over night and are paid hourly for dock work and by mileage for driving time. When traveling from one terminal to another, both P&D and line haul drivers are paid by the mile. The mileage rate is always the same whether driving during the first eight hours of work or after eight, which means you are getting the same rate of pay in both straight time and overtime.

Because the terminal has been so busy lately, many P&D drivers have been forced to make line haul trips following their P&D runs. This is effectively paying the drivers less than time and a half for overtime work. And for some reason, the U.S. Department of Labor does not consider this illegal.

I met with the terminal manager Tuesday morning for about two hours. When I was finished, he promised that if I returned to work, he would take care of all my problems but one. He said he cannot pay us time and a half for making a line haul run. Instead he promised that I would never have to do a line haul run again. But this does not excuse the fact that the line haul mileage rate is a scam and all our employees still have to accept it.

All the other grievances he agreed to take care of. And those are the ones that bother everyone, not just somé. I was skeptical, but two days later I already began to see results.

I was informed by a dock worker that the dockworkers were going to be allowed to work as many hours as they would like. In our company, there are no full-time dock workers. They are only allowed to work 25 hours per week. If they go over that, they are disciplined. Many dock workers try to squeeze in as many hours as they can because the job pays so well. I told the terminal manager in



order to lighten the long hours the drivers are doing, the terminal should keep the dock workers on longer. He agreed but said that it was "against the company philosophy" to have full-time dockworkers. I told him to violate the company philosophy temporarily to handle the busy season. And two days later, it became official. A dock worker approached me with the good news. They would be able to work as many hours as they would like and they would even be paid time and a half for any work done over eight hours.

The other big victory was the five new forklifts. I told the terminal manager that if we had more forklifts to unload the trailers, we would not have to unload the trailers by hand, and the operation would finish quicker. As a result, the line haul drivers would not be late leaving our terminal and there would be less mandatory overtime for those who do not want overtime. Three days after I returned to work, there were five new forklifts on the dock. Worker morale during the unloading and loading process that night was at a level I have not witnessed in my 18 months at the company. Nobody looked miserable.

The boss also sent two managers to be retrained in their supervising responsibilities. This was the result of my complaint that they talk to the drivers like children and needed to respect us or many would leave.

I could go into detail about the other victories but it is not necessary here. The point is that there is a shortage of drivers in America. Trucking companies, whether they admit it or not, are desperate for qualified tractor-trailer drivers. This gives the drivers a strategic negotiating position over working conditions. The problem, it seems, is that many drivers do not realize that they have a considerable amount of power over the bosses of the trucking industry. What my story proves is that right now the company will literally violate its own "philosophy" for one stinking driver. Imagine what they would do if two of us acted together, or three, or 15, or the whole terminal, or the whole company, or the whole industry?

Lakeside Packers strike ends

A bitter three-week strike to win a first contract at Alberta's largest slaughterhouse ended with a deal prohibiting strikes, slow downs and other job actions for 50 months. Workers will receive wage increases totalling CDN $1.60 over the life of the contract, but will not receive the breaks and other improvements in working conditions they had sought.

The contract with Lakeside owner Tyson Foods was approved by just 56 percent of union members. The strike was undermined by hundreds of workers who crossed picket lines from its inception. The contract is an improvement over Tyson's offer before the strike, but falls well short of recommendations by a provincial dispute inquiry panel.

Nineteen managers and workers were arrested during the strike, and an injunction imposed against workers. Two men were killed in a car crash on their way to picket.

BC teachers betrayed by head of BC Labour Fed

BY 355424, VANCOUVER

The recent strike by 38,000 British Columbia teachers ended after the leadership of the B.C. Federation of Labour once again proved to be little more than Judas rams.

Teachers voted Oct. 23 to return to work, but only after it became painfully clear that Jim Sinclair, president of the BC Fed, was unwilling to support a province-wide general strike. The teachers knew that active solidarity would not materialize if they continued to defy the courts. Teachers will be docked 10 days' pay for the strike, and their union fined CDN $500,000.

A healthy dose of rank-and-file industrial unionism is badly needed. Some existing trade unions, like the Teachers Federation and the Health Employees Union, understand the need for a general strike, but these unions' strike funds are routinely seized by the courts. The solution is laughably simple: copy the capitalists and move the strike funds so that the government cannot seize them. It's entirely legal to avoid the arms of the state. For example, tax avoidance, but not tax evasion, is permitted in Canada and in most countries. Treasurers of union funds must become familiar with making the resources of working people inaccessible to the courts/state.

If this isn't done, working people will grow even more apathetic than they already are. The level of trust for Canadians in the courts is quite low and the support for organized labour is quite high. But attitudes just don't mean much without effective action.

LabourStart TV: A new era in union communications?

BY ERIC LEE

The launch of LabourStart TV (at www.labourstart.tv) may mark the beginning of new era in union communications.

I say that knowing that it sounds like hyperbole, and grossly exaggerates what we are doing. But let me explain.

We have had the ability for more than a decade now to put videos on the net. The first clunky efforts (who remembers VDOLive?) were replaced by better tools like Real Player. Today's videos – viewable with software such as Windows Media Player and Quick Time – can actually be quite good. Several of the major media players around the world are investing a lot in the delivery of films and television through the net. The publicly owned BBC, for example, has announced plans to make nearly all of its programs viewable online.

And popular movements have also embraced the new technology. IndyMedia shows videos. So does OneWorld.

Unions, as usual, have lagged behind. And yet there have been examples for several years now of unions producing quality online video on a regular basis.

The outstanding example is probably the Canadian Auto Workers with its regular video news. The machinists' union (IAM) has also been producing videos on a regular basis and making them available through their website. The Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (UFCW) uses a digital camcorder to give members a chance to tell their stories, using web-based video as a recruiting tool. And in Vancouver, Working TV has been making its regular television program since the 1990s available through the net.

If you are a member of the CAW, IAM or RWDSU, you may have known this. But even then, you may not have known what other unions are doing. And if you're not a member



of any of those unions, you probably did not know that unions can use, and have been using, this technology for some time now.

I'm reminded a bit of what the trade union movement was like a decade ago. If your union had a website back in the mid-1990s, you might have been able to find out what was happening – in your union. If you wanted to know what was happening in the broader labour movement, there weren't a lot of ways to find out. To learn about union struggles overseas, you'd have to trawl through many different websites. Today, with news services like LabourStart offering up hundreds of union news stories from around the world every single day, everything has changed. Union members can keep up with union news, and can feel themselves part of a much broader international movement.

This has clearly changed the consciousness of many union members who now regularly participate in online campaigns in support of fellow workers in other countries. Websites that offer up international labour news have contributed a lot to that change of consciousness.

LabourStart.tv aims to do the same thing, only with sound and moving images. Here is how it works: The 350 volunteer LabourStart correspondents around the world can now add links to video files in addition to links to text-based news stories. Those video links are collected and displayed on LabourStart TV. Visitors to LabourStart TV can click on any of the links and watch and listen to labour news presented in a different way.

Right now, we're showing a video of the Iraqi labour solidarity tour, produced for U.S. Labor Against the War. We're showing a short tribute produced by the IAM to honor Rosa Parks. We have three short animated films produced by British trade unions – all of them, by the way, quite amusing. We have links to several speeches given at the recent founding convention of the Change to Win federation.

We know that all of this is a bit new for many union members, so we've made it easy to view the films. There are links to the software you might need next to each film, depending on its file type. But for most people with modern computers, you just click on the link and the video starts playing.

Like LabourStart, LabourStart TV does not create its own news content. We link to existing videos produced by unions.

As I write these words, we are showing links to 39 union videos produced in the last few months. By the time you read this, there will be many more. Already, you can spend several hours watching these videos.

Moving images with sound can do things that text cannot. We all know this. All of us watch television, play videos and DVDs, and go to the cinema.

We all know the value of film as a tool for propaganda – think back to early Soviet film pioneers like Eisenstein. When his classic, "Battleship Potemkin," was first shown in German cinemas, the audience rioted. Movies can move us profoundly – and they can move us to act.

I look forward to showing links to union videos in dozens of languages from around the world, showing workers in struggle and moving all of us to greater activity.

To do this requires that there be at least one place on the web that puts all of this together, that shows us what unions are doing and what can be done. The creation of such a place does offer the promise of a new era in labour communications. That is why I am so excited about LabourStart TV.

Part-time unemployment

B.C. enjoys Canada's fourth-lowest jobless rate, at 5.1 percent. However, part-time jobs grew 10 percent last year, nearly eight times the national average. Wages slightly outpaced inflation across most of Canada, but B.C. workers saw hourly pay rise only 0.5 percent – well below inflation, and behind the national average increase of 3.9 percent.

Informal work groups and resistance on the sunrise shift

BY MATT WILSON, PORTLAND
FROM THE STUMPTOWN WOBBLY

This is a story about a situation that happened at my workplace. Ideally, this will add to a conception of what Direct Unionism is, how it exists in everyday situations, and where we can go with it as an organization. This event happened around a year ago. While some of its impacts were immediate, it took me some time to develop an analysis, and to see clearly how this tied in with the development of class-consciousness. At this point I feel that I can look back, analyze the situation and draw out some lessons.

I worked on the sunrise shift at a parcel moving company represented by the Teamsters. At this company, and in this industry in general, every package is timed out to the last minute. Every day lost in not delivering a package costs this company money. The precision of the timing and the workers' role in maintaining the schedule furthers the opportunity for strategic opposition. This was especially true on my shift where the large majority of the packages being unloaded were on the last leg of their journey. These packages are going directly from us to the trucks that deliver things to your home.

Thus workers in the unload department were in a strategic position in effecting production. This was not immediately apparent to everyone working that section, but the realization eventually took hold. Over the course of roughly four months the unload crew, which consisted of about ten people, developed some pretty tight bonds. Everyone respected and trusted one another.

Day in and day out, the boss' goal is to get workers out after three and a half hours. The Teamsters negotiated into the contract that the company has to guarantee three and a half hours of work. At $8.50 or $9.50 an hour, this amount of time is not enough to live on. Moreover, the amount of work they expect people to get done in three and a half hours is easily four or five hours worth of work. In order to crank it out there are numerous methods. Making work into some kind of sport is one way, or just riding the hell out of people. I have even heard supervisors offering twenty bucks to certain stooges in order to make them work even faster.

In response to this constant speed-up at these low wages, our crew began to drag out the day and slow down as much as we could. All of us understood that being there for four or four and a half hours was important, and just as important was not letting the boss set the pace at which our bodies worked.

For obvious reasons, management did not like this so they began a series of restructuring efforts. They brought in different supervisors, trying to get the most hard-nosed bastard down there, or the friendliest your-older-brother-on-the-line type. None of this worked. Next management began to bring in new hires. It was around the time of the year when new hires are usually brought in, so it may not have been a method to destabilize us as a group. Whether deliberate or not, bringing on an extra set of hands could have undermined our informal production rate.

This particular cat that was brought in, young, straight out of high school, looked every bit to management like someone who would not fit in with our group. The most important aspect was that cat still lived with his folks, and was only working there for the education assistance UPS offers (the establishment of this is a side story of using student labor to pre-empt and undermine workers' power but I won't get into that here). The rest of us, although young, lived on our own and were supporting ourselves. So it seemed at first like he would not be down with the dynamics that existed. Quickly this proved not to be the case. Rather than hang out with supervisor training you at break during the first few weeks, which is customary as this is the only person you know and basically you're cornered into it, he would come chill with us in the break room. He was loud, talked good shit, and openly defied the boss.

It is hard to say what bothered the bosses more – Willy hanging out with us, or his refusal to go the pace they demanded. This pace varies between 23 and 30 boxes a minute, pretty staggering in general. He kept his pace right around ours, which varied from person to person but was much lower than the boss's numbers. It got to a point where management began threatening to fire him. He came to us. Our advice, which was probably a mistake but stuck within the confines of the union contract, was pick it up until you hit the end of your probation period. It takes a new hire 70 working days until he is a "member" of the union, and under its protection from discipline. This is 70 days of speed-up, manipulation and harassment, during which time the union can only look the other way. As a shop steward once explained to me, "If he's under 90 days I can't touch the situation.



He took our advice, but it proved to not be enough. Even though he was exceeding their production numbers at a pace unbelievable to the rest of us, they were still on his ass.

It got to a point where management decided to restart his training at the beginning. Even though it had been well over a month, it was obvious that this was meant to break him away from our group. This led us to respond with some kind of collective action.

This group had been the driving force throughout the escalating conflict but never had we decided to define ourselves as a group, the line had never come down.

Everyone was at the boiling point in the break room that day. The discussion quickly moved beyond statements like "how could they do that?" It quickly became how were we going to respond and help this cat out.

Driven both by our feelings for Willy and by the realization that this attack on him was an attack on us as well, we resolved to take action. It was known from previous experience that the shop stewards would not help as they were confined by the contract. We resolved in the break room to confront out supervisor after break during the PCM (a communication session usually reserved for safety things, or general company cheerleading). Our demands were pretty simple: We wanted an end to the harassment of Willy, and specifically we wanted this supervisor named Chris who had been training Willy kicked off the belt. It was never openly discussed how we would ensure that these demands were met although the term "strike" was mentioned. No one seemed ready to go that far until after we presented our demands.

So we sat down on a belt that still wasn't moving as we did every day, everyone nervously glancing at one another to figure out who would speak up first. No one had been designated to speak. As the supervisor, Drew, began to talk his bullshit he was quickly silenced, I don't remember by whom, with the announcement that we were going to talk and he was going to listen. This was the first time we had defined ourselves as a group, an act within itself with certain implications for management. A shift in floor power definitely occurred and people felt it immediately.

Drew's jaw dropped to the floor as we poured forth out demands. Each person who wanted to speak did so. Our demands were presented. His reiteration, spoke in a shaky voice was that it wasn't our business to say what supervisors did and that we should get back to work. Someone threatened some kind of strike action. Ears perked up, and Drew really went to shit. Demanding that we all go back to work that instant. None of us jumped up, but rather looked around for some kind of understanding where the others were. We went back to work a few seconds later.

For the next little bit people felt great and no one was thinking about the repercussions. Until we saw a swarm of supervisors coming around the trailer. People began to get fingered out by Drew and one by one called out of trailers. A shop steward was down on the floor along with upper management. The main supervisor stood with his arms crossed while the other one did the berating. The supervisor, whose usual demeanor was all about being buddies, threatened to immediately fire the whole belt if he had to if ever anyone said anything about a strike again. During my berating session, as I tried to clear up the situation by reiterating our demands (which only seemed to make them more pissed) I continuously looked at the shop steward for some support. Nothing coming. Afterwards he pulled me aside, shook my hand, and tacitly gave approval to what we had done.

That's what a union is he said, us workers sticking together.

Well, the next few weeks were great. Chris got transferred off the belt and people began to leave Willy alone. We all felt great about coming to a place most of us had hated only six months earlier. The bosses did not try any retaliation – not even a write-up, they seemed to not want to bring it up. Which of course did not stop us from bringing it up.

This story does not end however on a happy note. I think having seen our group as a force the bosses began to move against it, with increased vigor. Most of the tactics we didn't really see coming. Isolation was a big one. Individuals were sent to different parts of the building or began getting some overt special treatment. The union and the contract were used as a way to isolate one person from the rest of us, based on seniority and disciplinary matters. One cat in particular, due to threats from management and a refusal from the union to have his back anymore, went from being outspoken to silent due to a real fear of losing his job.

Personal problems between workers were also used with management openly trying to incite waives of shit talking between people. It went from a situation of friends who had each other's backs, to acquaintances that didn't trust one and another. Management set this up with the goal of breaking us apart. However, we could have countered each tactic used by management with some foresight and some training. But due to inexperience this did not happen. Lastly, we were isolated from a movement or from other shops with similar situations. We were away from other people who were struggling in a similar way against their bosses and the union. Being connected to such a group could have given us the foresight and resources to counter management's attack.

This incident and the months leading up to and preceding it had a major impact on my thinking. Certainly, although not at the time, it taught me a lot about autonomous worker organizing. Workers on their job site form bonds and create an informal work group, that naturally go against the isolation that work aims to impose. Groups form naturally among diverse people who may not have ever conceived of laughing and bullshitting with other workers. These groups then quite easily become the grounds for struggle against the bosses. This is based on the ability of workers to simply come together and air their beefs, realize the commonality, and trust one and another enough to engage in struggle. This was evident in my experience. I do not mean to make it seem like we were all best friends.

Some people got along better than others, occasionally people might have a falling out, but at the end of the day it was clear there was a group and it was composed of us workers. Stan Wier and Martin Glaberman, two working-class writers and revolutionaries of the late twentieth century, wrote about similar topics. It is to them and fellow workers around me, as well as my experience that I owe my current understanding of informal work groups. This experience also shaped my idea of formation of class-consciousness.

By this term I mean workers identifying themselves as such, and recognizing that they have different interests with the bosses. How is this shaped? What I realized it that class-consciousness is shaped by two threads in my story. First and initially being involved in labor and recognizing that this labor is being also taken up and affected by those around you form it. The basis of informal work groups is the initial basis of class-consciousness.

A second component, and in some ways is created by the first, but goes beyond it is struggle. This is the recognition that not only are you part of a group, but a group that relies on each other. Class-consciousness manifests itself on the shop floor, sometimes in subtle ways, a quick fuck you to the boss for example. Other times it is the willingness to take on the problem of the cat next to you as if it were your own, and taking action based on this. That it is important to stand up for the cat next to you, not just out of your personal relationship (what if you think the guy is an ass) but because in the process you are standing up for *yourself*. Moreover, when workers define themselves as a group and confront the boss in any manner, it furthers their understanding of what that group is and what power it has. Collective action reinforces that group understanding and forms class-consciousness. While this has been my experience, the writings of Martin Glaberman have definitely helped this understanding along.

It is important to realize that the potential for and the actual occurrence of these actions are widespread. It covers every shift everyday in every shop. How can we see these actions and offer assistance when it is needed? A good place to start if by simply being there. The models of Direct Unionism I see discussed are the way to begin moving towards this.

We could have organizers in these groupings, observing and mapping what is going on, in contact with others in the same shop or industry, this would form the basic shop committee. This grouping would be part of a larger industrial organizing committee. The Industrial Organizing Committee could connect what would otherwise be isolated struggles. Out of the IOC made up of members of the shop committees would be a grievance committee, whose aim would be collecting grievances, doing research and strategizing how to deal with them. The ability would then exist to move with actions and offer assistance, sometimes maybe even to coordinate. I see this model being applicable in a situation where no union is present (as is the majority of situations in the US) or even as in my situation where a union is present.

At the present it seems like these models only exist in people's head or floating around in conversations. But as I hope my story illustrates the core of these models, the shop committees, to some extent already exist in informal work groups. Thus this organizing model develops not out of some purely theoretical framework, but out of how work and workers are organized by capital. And more importantly how workers resist capital where it means the most, on the job.

Northwest Airlines strike: Where is labor going?

continued from page 1

regulated by the Railway Labor Act). AMFA also hoped for help from other unions, who they expected would recognize what they had at stake in this struggle.

As I write this article, six weeks into the strike (early October), some of this has come to pass, and some of it hasn't. The strike has persisted with impressive unity and activism among the strikers. AMFA reports that about 300 of its members retired on the eve of the strike, and that about 40 (less than 1 percent) have crossed their own picket lines. NWA's business appears to have continued unfazed. In mid-September the airline declared bankruptcy and announced that they would begin to make permanent hires out of some of their temporary replacements. They also announced that they will lay off 1,400 flight attendants (with whose union they are in the midst of bargaining concessions) in the next few months. The IAM and ALPA are waiting in line for their turn at the concessions table (or is it a guillotine?). Despite a virtual media blackout, the strike persists.

Union Busting 101

NWA's labor relations strategy has deep roots in the tangled, bloody financial history of the airlines industry. Like most U.S. airlines, it has teetered on the edge of economic collapse since the dawn of deregulation, the Staggers Act of 1978 (passed by the same Democratic-led Congress and Democratic president, Jimmy Carter, who could not pass pro-labor legislation). Since then airlines have come and gone, with lots of "low-cost" carriers entering the industry, only to exit almost as quickly, and several long-operating carriers declaring bankruptcy, some to reorganize and some, like Pan American and Eastern, to go out of business altogether.

Most major carriers have restructured their operations along lines that our brothers and sisters in the construction industry would recognize as "double-breasting." That is, they have set up their own regional carriers, largely owned and certainly controlled by the big airlines, and supplied them with smaller planes for which they hired lower-paid workers – some union, some not – while guaranteeing them the business of ferrying passengers from smaller cities to their major hubs. These airlines have contracted out the spokes in their "hub-and-spoke" systems – to themselves, in disguise, serving as their own sub-contractors. Then the carriers use the lower wages and benefits paid by the regionals to pressure their own workers in the name of "competition."

The tangled webs of the industry don't end here. The major carriers, beneficiaries of regional monopoly status (NWA controls 80 percent of business in the Twin Cities, its major hub), slug it out with each other like those old plastic knock-your-block-off robots that kids played with before the invention of video games, in an environment in which prices have been kept down despite rising costs. They groan under the weight of pension obligations, union wage scales and work rules, and rising fuel costs. But the owners of their airplanes (GE Credit is the major owner, regardless of the carrier monogram painted on the tail fin) and the owners of their debt (banks, financial institutions, mutual funds, and the like) have made healthy profits.

Airline executives, preferred stock holders, and financial players have not done too shabbily either. Through inflated salaries (keeping up with their counterparts in the rest of the business world), bonuses and stock options, they have emptied airline coffers of billions of dollars. At NWA alone, in just the past two years, a handful of executives dumped $400 million in stock they had purchased through options before the stock tanked from $50 a share to $4 a share to $1.50 a share. Their ability to avoid prosecution suggests how clumsy their buddies at Tyco, Enron and the like must have been.

The point is not the executives' greed and misdeeds, although there has been plenty of that. It is the creation, through economics, politics and power, of a system in which workers create profits that cannot be ploughed back into that industry for the lack of profitable investment outlets. That wealth is siphoned off to other outlets, the financial industry itself, for one, but also including the skyrocketing consumption patterns of the top owners (including, in NWA's Al Checci's case, a quixotic, self-funded campaign for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination in California). At some point – in the airlines, clearly now – a crisis is reached.

Then the workers are targeted as the "solution" to the crisis. They must work more and earn less. They must adapt their human needs (families, leisure, the pursuit of personal growth, hobbies, interests, community participation) to the demands of their employer for a workforce that is on call, available, "flexible." If not, if they balk, they can be replaced with other workers more desperate than they, from their own communities, from elsewhere in the U.S., from elsewhere in the world. And if they are organized into unions and try to use those unions to defend what they and their predecessors have built, then those unions must be broken.

NWA made extensive preparations for AMFA's strike. They hired and trained 1,200 replacement mechanics, lodged them in hotels near their hubs in Minneapolis and Detroit, and reassigned management personnel with the appropriate licenses to take off their white shirts and ties, put on overalls, and go back into the hangars. They expanded their global outsourcing of repair and service work, with contractors in Singapore, Hong Kong, El Salvador and Mexico, as well as non-union facilities in the U.S. South, performing routine maintenance work. (AMFA inherited a contract negotiated by the IAM which had included no language limiting "farming out." In their first contract, they reached a "compromise" of 38 percent, which NWA wanted to raise to 53 percent in their current proposal. These percentages are calculated not in jobs, human bodies or hours, but by monetary value. Hence, if a mechanic in Singapore makes half or less of what his U.S. counterpart makes, the amount of work that can contractually be outsourced is much higher than we might imagine.)

NWA's preparations went far beyond getting their repair work done. Four months before the strike began, they secretly contracted with ABM, the country's largest corporate cleaner, for all of the custodians' jobs. They contracted with a local temp agency, Globe Services, for the cleaners' jobs. They hired Vance Security International, an infamous anti-union private security firm, and their reviled Asset Protection Team, to intimidate strikers and any workers who might consider honoring picket lines. And they relied on their well-established relationships with the government and the mass media to get their agenda implemented, sanctioned, and represented as "necessary" and a "done deal."

Tax-funded union-busters

NWA had relied as much and as long on government assistance, even in the ostensibly deregulated environment, as they did on concessions from their workers. In 1993 NWA management threatened bankruptcy and put out their hands. They pressured workers to make major concessions and asked the state of Minnesota to provide an $823 million loan at below-market interest rates. In return they promised to build a maintenance hub in economically depressed northern Minnesota which would employ some 900 mechanics. They got the loan but never built the facility. They have not repaid the loan and state officials refuse to even discuss its status.

> *Workers are targeted as the "solution" to the crisis. They must work more and earn less. They must adapt their human needs ... to employers' demands for a workforce that is on call, available, "flexible" ...*

Meanwhile, other branches of government, such as the Metropolitan Airport Commission, continue to function as NWA's junior partner, from fighting neighbors who complain about noise pollution to limiting free speech and picketing at the airport to marginalizing other carriers who would like more convenient gates for their service. In some crazy paroxysm of popular democracy back in the glory days of the early 1970s, an earlier incarnation of the MAC actually passed an "anti-scab" regulation which the current administration refuses to enforce.

And, then, of course, there is the federal government. Not only did Congress enact deregulation at the airlines' bidding in 1978, but ensuing presidents have carefully used their power to intervene or not in labor conflicts to enhance corporate management's exercise of its power.

In the current strike, AMFA's insistence that NWA's new maintenance system is unsafe seems borne out by hundreds of complaints filed by Federal Aviation Administration inspectors. Two days into the strike, a veteran inspector in the Twin Cities was reassigned to a desk after NWA complained that he was "too aggressive" in enforcing rules and regulations. Two weeks later, he brought more than 470 complaints, of his own and from many of his peers, to U.S. Senator Mark Dayton, who called on the Office of the Inspector General to investigate. The FAA inspectors' own union called for a public investigation. There have been no results other than a statement by the head of the FAA that all is well.

There is also the matter of NWA's – and the other major airlines – pension obligations. After years of ignoring, with apparent impunity their commitments to make payments into workers' pension accounts (where were the auditors and the regulators who should have been checking their books?), NWA and other airlines (and other employers throughout the economy) are revealing that they failed to do so and, now, cannot afford to make up the difference. Threatening to dump their pension obligations onto the government's Pension Benefit Guarantee Corporation (which United Airlines has done), NWA and other airlines have asked Congress to pass legislation allowing them to delay and spread out their legal pension obligations. Surprisingly, they have not asked for a parallel bill that would require their workers to delay, defer and spread out their aging and dying. Minnesota Republican Senator Norm Coleman, an utter corporate hack, has introduced legislation to allow this, claiming that he is acting to protect workers' interests.

While it can be difficult to sort tragedy from farce, it is clear that NWA's lobbying dollars have been well-spent.

Let us not forget the media. NWA has spent millions of dollars advertising in Twin Cities media outlets, which are, of course, controlled by corporations with similar goals and needs. Neither of the Twin Cities' daily newspapers have labor reporters. Their airline industry reporters were assigned to the story, with support from new reporters who knew none of the history of labor relations in the industry or the region. Editors sought to confine the story to the nether regions of the papers. For instance, when NWA hired Vance Security the week before the strike began, I informed the *St. Paul Pioneer Press'* lead reporter, who had no idea who they were, that her own employer, Knight Ridder, had hired Vance in the Detroit newspaper strike of the mid-1990s and that she had an obligation to disclose this when she wrote about their introduction into the NWA scene. Instead, her editor took her off the story, placed a story by another reporter mentioning "union complaints" about an unnamed "private security company" on the obituary page (really!) and held back from mentioning Vance by name for another month!

The *Minneapolis Star Tribune* has gone so far as to publish a human interest profile of a scab on the front page (above the fold!) of their business section. Despite pressure from the union, they held back on a story about the FAA investigations until Oct. 2.

The electronic media has not been much better. While Minnesota Public Radio has offered some analysis of the strike, they have typically sought out "objective" commentators, most of whom hail from the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Business, while the commercial networks have been limited to 15 second visuals and sound bites. All have continued to feed the flying public's addiction to low prices at any cost. None have been willing to ask probing questions about the industry, its history and its workers. All of this has been fed by NWA's public relations machine and it has, in turn, fed an environment in which management's position has seemed "reasonable" and "the only choice."

This has especially been the case with NWA's decision to declare bankruptcy in September, a month into the strike. Encouraged by the example of United Airlines, which has spent three years in bankruptcy, shedding workers, lowering wages and dumping pension obligations, NWA sought to enter bankruptcy under the same rules. They claimed that the AMFA strike played no role in their decision and that AMFA will have no voice as the bankruptcy process unfolds. That may well be management's intent, but it is also true that by bringing its day-to-day business decisions and outcomes into a public courtroom, NWA management will become more vulnerable to union investigations and more susceptible to appeals to the public. For instance, in the last week of September, NWA came before the judge to request that they be allowed to pay top management their annual bonuses! The judge may allow this, but not before the union and its allies are able to bring this to the attention of the public. Interestingly, this motion was made just as AMFA was announcing that it had hired Ray Rogers and his Corporate Campaign, Inc. to conduct strategic research and develop public relations for their struggle. While bankruptcy will strengthen the airline's hand in its continued collective bargaining with other NWA unions, it could well also leave it more vulnerable to unconventional union strategies.

NWA management's implementation of its well-conceived, well-funded union busting strategy has caught the attention of corporate managers and their consultants not

Scabbing Northwest unions take wage cuts

As Northwest continues to claim it is not being affected by a strike by machinists and airplane cleaners, the U.S. Labor Department reports that it has the worst on-time performance of any major airline.

Meanwhile, unions representing scabbing pilots and flight attendants agreed to mid-contract concessions under threat that Northwest would go to bankruptcy court to void their labor agreements.

Scabbing pilots voted to accept a "temporary" 25 percent pay cut, on top of previously agreed cuts. The International Association of Machinists, which represents baggage handlers and other ground crew, has not reached a deal but said it would not go to bankruptcy court to fight imposition of an interim cut of 19 percent.

Northwest also reached deals for permanent wage and benefit reductions with the Aircraft Technical Support Association and the Northwest Airlines Meteorology Association. NWA is also negotiating with the Transport Workers Union. The cuts are emergency measures while Northwest negotiates for deeper concessions. Each union is working behind picket lines.



only in the airlines industry but throughout the economy. If they succeed, other unions can expect to face similar strategies. But it is also important to note that this struggle is far from over. Bankruptcy and the still unsettled relations with other unions, within a context of continuing questions about NWA's safety and its ability to fly its schedule with an over-worked cohort of reassigned managers and partially trained replacements providing maintenance, suggests that many twists and turns still lie ahead.

Solidarity Forever?

No factor is more important than the support – or lack of support – that the strikers receive from other unions. Throughout the airline industry, reminiscent of the railroads a century ago when Eugene V. Debs argued for the creation of one big railway union, multiple unions fragment workers. Different occupational groups – pilots, flight attendants, mechanics, baggage handlers, ticket agents, white collar workers, etc. – belong to different unions at the same airlines and to different unions across the airlines. Unity of action has been effectively blocked for decades, despite the right to sympathy strike (the Taft-Hartley Act does not apply to industries regulated by the Railway Labor Act). Unions have been pitted against each other at the bargaining table, especially in the concessionary environment of the past decade. The larger labor "movement" has not provided effective mechanisms to bring unions together.

This struggle is far from over ... the sleeping giant of the U.S. labor movement might yet awaken and demonstrate that it does not deserve the Wobblies' sobriquet of the "American Separation of Labor."

The particular history of unions at NWA has played a key role in these dynamics, and may hold the key to a very disturbing scenario that might play out in the weeks and months ahead. The IAM has excoriated AMFA as "raiders" and "elitists," and has so far convinced the AFL-CIO to withhold support and to encourage its affiliates to do the same. Interest in AMFA grew at NWA after the 1993 round of concessions. NWA threatened bankruptcy, but in exchange for 20 percent wage concessions they offered common stock which they promised to buy back (but never did) and promised that wages would "snap back" three to five years down the road, which they did.

When the mechanics, cleaners, custodians, baggage handlers, ticket agents and white collar office workers said "No," their union, International Association of Machinists District 143, insisted that they vote, revote and re-revote (what is "democracy" the third time over?) on the same package. As voter turnout plummeted, the concessionary contract was finally ratified. Union members soon voted IAM District 143 and IAM Local 1833 officers out, and when the new officers proved as inept as their predecessors a group of mechanics turned to AMFA, circulated election cards, and successfully promoted a change in affiliation. They argued that they needed a union that would be democratic and transparent, under its members' control, and they argued that skilled mechanics could do better for themselves without being tied to the mix of workers represented by the IAM. Their craft orientation certainly evinced some elitism towards other workers. The IAM also used its influence with the National Mediation Board (this was during the Clinton administration) to get the bargaining unit redrawn to include the custodians and cleaners now in AMFA's jurisdiction. They were hoping that these workers, who had not been courted by AMFA's advocates, would vote to stay with the IAM and thereby defeat the reaffiliation.

But AMFA won the 1999 representation election hands down and went on to negotiate a contract that brought substantial wage increases to workers whose wages had stagnated for more than a decade. They also instituted internal union practices which cemented the allegiance of their members. AMFA locals have no bureaucracy, no full-time officers. AMFA officers wear the same overalls and work the same jobs as the women and men they represent. Any member who wishes to watch a bargaining session is welcome to attend, despite fierce protests from management. Although AMFA did not seek to include the cleaners and custodians within its ranks, they have been integrated into the union's internal life at a local level.

Northwest flight attendants were long represented (this is generous use of this verb) by the Teamsters' sprawling Local 2000. In the mid-1990s, the same wave of rank-and-file protest and energy that brought Ron Carey to the national presidency of the Teamsters shook Local 2000. A slate of candidates led by partisans of Teamsters for a Democratic Union were elected to the leadership. They initiated an aggressive campaign of internal organizing and internal education. But when Carey was toppled by James Hoffa, the national Teamsters officialdom began to crack down on Local 2000. Hoffa appointed a "personal representative" to attend every meeting of the union's executive board as well as membership meetings. This "personal representative" began to disrupt the executive board, to gay-bait and red-bait its leaders, and to bring their activities to a grinding halt. Shortly after the NWA mechanics defected to AMFA, frustrated flight attendants launched their own campaign to withdraw from the Teamsters and start their own independent union, modeled after AMFA, called the Professional Flight Attendants Association. When Hoffa responded by placing Local 2000 under trusteeship, he pretty much guaranteed that the Teamsters would lose the election.

There's more. When NWA compelled unions to accept concessions in exchange for common stock in 1993, they offered a seat on the board of directors to a representative from each union. Once the ink was dry on the deal, they insisted that these directors had a fiduciary responsibility to the company and could not share information with the unions and workers whose interests they were supposed to represent. Bad enough? No, there's more. When 10,000 mechanics, cleaners and custodians elected AMFA to represent their interests and 14,000 flight attendants elected PFAA, NWA refused to give them seats on the board. They continued to treat the IAM and the Teamsters as if they still represented the workers who had voted them out, and they still sit there. Behind closed doors, AMFA and PFAA activists and their supporters discuss a nightmare scenario in which both unions would be broken by NWA, decertified, and then replaced, via sweetheart agreements, by the IAM and the Teamsters, allowing NWA to continue to represent itself as a "union" airline. Stranger things have happened.

Union scabbing

That these two unions hostile to the mechanics, custodians, cleaners and flight attendants now reside in the two opposing factions of the so-called labor "movement" (or is it "organized" labor?) has undermined the strikers' ability to mobilize labor support. The IAM and AFL-CIO have been overtly hostile. The IAM not only ordered its members to cross AMFA's picket lines, it also negotiated with NWA to "take back" work, such as the pushing back of airplanes, which had been "theirs" before the 1999 redrawing of the bargaining units. Rick Banks, director of the AFL-CIO's Collective Bargaining Department, privately ordered city and state labor federations and affiliates not to provide AMFA strikers with food, money or other material support, even as AFL-CIO President John Sweeney publicly claimed that their beef was with AMFA but not the striking workers.

Leaders of central labor bodies in the Twin Cities moved quickly to discourage affiliated unions from offering support, speaking at rallies, or welcoming AMFA speakers at their meetings. However, several local unions joined solidarity efforts anyway.

The Teamsters have not been as overly hostile, but their behavior bears scrutiny. IBT national vice-president Tom Keegle resides in the Twin Cities (where he collects – I hesitate to say "earns" – two of his multiple salaries), and he has refused to take calls from AMFA leaders. IBT national president James Hoffa has been similarly unavailable. Individual UPS drivers have refused to cross AMFA picket lines, and some have come out to join the picket lines, but the range of support which might be available from the Teamsters has not been forthcoming. This has been further complicated by the announcement that the Teamsters are circulating representation cards to flight attendants on NWA property, on the heels of a similar announcement from the CWA-affiliated Association of Flight Attendants. The launching of a three-way representational squabble in the midst of negotiations that threaten substantial job and pay cuts, in the midst of the mechanics' strike, has hardly contributed to the flight attendants' figuring out how they can bring their solidarity to this struggle.

I do not want to suggest that there has been no labor support forthcoming, although this has been one of the defeatist mantras recited over and over by the mass media. Indeed, I have been very involved in the Twin Cities Northwest Workers Solidarity Committee, and we have counterparts in Boston, Detroit and San Francisco. These networks of local activists have mobilized support for the strikers from dozens of unions and hundreds of rank-and-file workers. Supporters in Boston were able to mobilize Jobs with Justice in their community and nationally to step up on behalf of the strikers, despite opposition from the AFL-CIO. The UAW national leadership donated $880,000.

In Detroit and San Francisco, strike supporters have participated in Labor Day parades, pushed for central labor body resolutions of support, and raised the visibility of the conflict. In all four cities, supporters have organized rallies and fundraisers and participated with AMFA members in actions directed against scabs or corporate officials.

In the Twin Cities, there have been several dramatic actions. Two weeks into the strike, hundreds of AMFA members and supporters blocked buses transporting scabs from their hotels to the airport. An entire shift was delayed for several hours. Two weeks later, supporters leaving a rally near the airport formed a caravan with more than 100 vehicles, jamming the access road to the main gate for the scab buses, and delaying yet another shift. These actions helped bring the strike back into the media's closing eye, interfered with NWA's ability to get its repair work done, built a sense of unity among the participants, and raised the strikers' spirits by demonstrating that they were not alone.

No one believes, however, that such actions can win the strike. The refusal of ALPA, the PFAA and the IAM to honor AMFA's picket lines, despite their legal right to do so, has been a particular point of frustration. Half a dozen rank-and-file IAM members have refused to cross picket lines, despite threats by their own union that they would never get them their jobs back and would see to it that other unions did not contribute to their finances. They have become local folk heroes, the moral center of the struggle, as have a handful of flight attendants who have either refused to work or have written up safety infractions and spoken publicly about it.

As the strike began, PFAA leaders put out a referendum on whether the PFAA should honor AMFA's picket lines. The leadership sat silent during the voting period, however, while NWA management muscled the flight attendants. NWA sent out two memos and several emails threatening to fire any flight attendant who refused to report to work, even though they do not have the right to fire them. They brought back more than 1,000 flight attendants who had been on lay-off, and made it known that they were planning to replace U.S. flight attendants with Japanese and Thai attendants on flights that originated in Asia. The vote failed.

The pilots came to this conflict determined to prevent a NWA bankruptcy due to the threat that represented to their pensions. They knew they had the power to shut the airline down, but were afraid that this would drive the airline immediately into bankruptcy. Now that NWA has filed bankruptcy anyway, ALPA seems to prefer to count on the Coleman bill to "reform" NWA's pensions to taking their fates into their own hands by walking out with the mechanics. Individual pilots have raised safety questions, delayed and even caused the cancellation of flights, but the union refuses to act collectively.

Meanwhile, NWA has continued a reign of terror over the flight attendants. Dozens have been summoned to "Q-and-A" sessions where they are threatened with discipline for having written up safety problems on their flights. One flight attendant was publicly "fired" for refusing to cross the AMFA picket lines at the beginning of the strike. When it was made clear that she was within her rights under the Railway Labor Act, management quietly informed her that she should consider herself "furloughed." The media never reported the change in her status.

Welcome to labor relations in the era of neo-liberalism. We've seen bits and pieces of all this since the Hormel strike of 1985-86, maybe even before. Corporate management, the government, and union leaders have all followed similar scripts before. It's never quite come together so thoroughly, so quickly and so starkly, though.

It seems ironic that this story has unfolded in the 100th anniversary year of the founding of the IWW, the 70th anniversary of the passage of the National Labor Relations Act, the 50th anniversary of the merger of the AFL and the CIO, and the 20th anniversary of the Hormel strike. But this struggle is far from over. AMFA's ranks are holding firm, the significance of the bankruptcy situation has yet to reveal itself, and the sleeping giant of the U.S. labor movement might awaken at any moment and demonstrate that it does not deserve the Wobblies' sobriquet of the "American Separation of Labor."

London Wobblies celebrate and plan

BY DAN JAKOPOVICH, LONDON

The recently established London IWW group, which seems to have given a new lease of life to Wobblies in the British Isles, held an IWW centenary celebration at the RampART squatted social centre in East London on 5 November. It was our first public event where the core group, which was established a few months ago, had a general presentation of its ideals, goals and methods.

The high point of the evening was a discussion on building autonomous workers' resistance in London. This was largely centred around trying to draw on previous experiences, such as the Gate Gourmet dispute (See for instance my article "Gate Gourmet: 'not over yet,'" *Freedom*, 15 October), that have confirmed the importance of militant rank-and-file unionism as the only promising means for annulling the present laws against solidarity strikes. The grassroots democratic model of the Workmates Collective of West London tube workers was also mentioned.

Partly drawing on the perspective of minority/solidarity unionism, the Paris Solidarity Collectives and the flying squads/pickets are particularly refreshing, even if far from being a historically new tactic. Jeff Shantz describes "Flying squads [as] rapid response networks of workers that can be mobilized for strike support, demonstrations, direct action and working class defense of immigrants, poor people, and unemployed workers ... [which] may consist of little more than phone lists and meetings." The emphasis is on "the emergence and growth of autonomous rank-and-file networks." ("Developing Workers Autonomy," http://nefac.net/en/node/915)

Alex Levant notes that flying squads have engaged in activities including "supporting striking workers; as well as unorganized, unemployed, and unpaid workers, stopping deportations, challenging abusive landlords, and mobilizing for mass protests against capitalist globalization. ... By developing abilities that normally atrophy under capitalism, flying squads help overcome the crisis of working-class self-organization."("Flying Squads and the Crisis of Workers' Self-Organisation," *New Socialist*, Spring 2003)

In addition to these benefits, flying squads/pickets could also contribute, among other things, to the creation of an authentic "community of resistance" – greater cooperation, coordination and general interaction within "the broader movement," linking groups and struggles which have previously been isolated and disconnected, or at least failed to live up to their true potential. However, there is also a danger of stagnating and inward-turning flying squads slipping into "activist" roles, followed by progressive disassociation from the workers themselves.

Serious and consistent strategising is needed, which should also involve a greater openness to the labour-community model of organising. The unfolding "regeneration" (gentrification) of East London (further legitimised and also accelerated by the 2012 London Olympics) and the probability of a council tax increase, property values and rents skyrocketing (effectively driving working-class people to the outskirts of the city – a phenomenon which has already happened to many Cockneys during the "regeneration" of the Docklands during the 60s, 70s & 80s) – coupled with tens of thousands expected new, mostly Eastern European (hyper-exploited) building workers, relatively militant transport workers and the great bargaining power of the many service industries closely tied to the Olympics – constitutes a potentially explosive mix which could offset a general upsurge in working-class combativity.

One of the prominent issues which were raised in the discussion (particularly by disenchanted, yet active members of the business unions) revolved around the benefits of dual membership (which the IWW allows) and the need for a core group of the most militant workers who could more easily develop rank-and-file factions and networks in and across their unions, simultaneously helping to provide the IWW with a larger pool of experience, resources and access to rank-and-file union members (and in turn increasing the chances for building stronger and new workplace resistance groups).

Obviously, there are many other considerations and possibilities, many of which are more typical of the general IWW approach it is famous for. One thing is certain – there is no adequate substitute for challenging the labour dry spell, and it is high time for the British libertarian left to finally start embracing workers' struggles, agitation and organising again. I believe the IWW could have an important role to play in these efforts.

Pittsburgh Wobblies celebrate IWW centenary

On October 22 the Pittsburgh GMB held a well-attended Centenary celebration at the historic Pump House, site of the 1892 Battle of Homestead between striking steel workers and the bosses. Over 75 Wobblies and supporters attended the one day open house from across the region.

Guests had a chance to view the traveling Wobbly Art show, the IWW historical panels from Wayne State University, and a vast collection of IWW postcards. Table displays demonstrated the branch's organizing efforts, including the newly formed Education Workers Organizing Committee, Pittsburgh's connection to the global textile workers campaign, recent co-op organizing, as well as local and national efforts to publicize police brutality against labor and citizens.

In conjunction with a table display of historic IWW activities in Pittsburgh and the region, Fellow Worker E.W. Wolfson presented a detailed talk on the history of the IWW in Pittsburgh.

Throughout the day, Pittsburgh Wobs created a space for free speech and sometimes contentious soap boxing on such topics as solidarity unionism, time contracts, police brutality, labor and the environment, the overthrow of capitalism, and labor's response to the war. Wobblies also educated the crowd about the importance of art and music in the life of the IWW and led the crowd in resounding versions of our classic labor songs, such as Solidarity Forever, Joe Hill, and The Preacher and the Slave.

A highlight of the day came from a visit by Jennie Cedervall and her family from the Cleveland area. FW Cedervall, a spry 92 years old, discussed her background in the union involving organizing the Metal and Machinery Workers shops (IU440) in the Cleveland area from the early 1930s until the 1950s. FW Cedervall is the daughter of Romanian IWW members in Detroit and was involved in the Junior Wobblies as a teenager. She met her husband, the late IWW organizer Frank Cedervall, at a union picnic. Jennie has continued to support the IWW throughout the years and encouraged many Centenary guests to join the union, stressing the real gains won by workers through IWW organizing.

Guests and participants included members of the Battle of Homestead Foundation, United Steelworkers, NEA, UNITE HERE, SEIU, and performers from the Raging Grannies (led by FW Mimi Yahn) and the Pittsburgh Steel Gum Bandits.

"The day was a great success," said Kevin Farkas, chair of the Pgh Centenary Coordinating Committee. "Part of our success was that we attracted guests from as far away as Columbus Ohio, Central Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, and Northern New Jersey. But the event was more than just a celebration of our local union history, it was also a chance for branch members to commit themselves to a significant project and work together in cooperation and solidarity."

Wobbly free radio

WRFU(Radio Free Urbana, 104.5 FM) signed on the air Nov. 13. The low-power station sponsored by the Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) Independent Media Center was entirely built by union labor, including members of the IWW. The studio is located in the IMC's new building, the former Urbana post office. An IWW office is set to open there next year.

Sweatfree Xmas, baseball

The Pittsburgh Anti Sweatshop Community Alliance and Azania Heritage International have established the SweatFree Communities Holiday Auction to help those who wish to give gifts that will inspire justice (and help support workers' struggles in sweatshops around the world): www.sweatfreecommunities.org

Make plans to join us in Pittsburgh for rousing All-Star sweatshop education during Major League Baseball's All Star Game July 11, 2006.

Fight for shorter Hours

ORGANIZATION

Aussie government after five-day week

Australian Prime Minister John Howard has declared that the five-day work week is "extinct" as the Labour opposition warns that the Government's workplace "reforms" would undermine families' work-life balance.

Howard told Parliament that "the world has changed from the days when we were a five-day-a-week society ... and our industrial relations system has to change with it."

Opposition lawmakers said the legislation would allow employers to require workers to work irregular and family unfriendly hours without adequate compensation. Unions and most churches have condemned the new laws.

Software workers want lives

Computer industry trade magazine Cnet reports that software manufacturers are cutting back on work hours, in part to hold on to dissatisfied programmers who want more time to live their lives. In addition, many software makers have concluded that productivity suffers when employees work extended days month after month.

However, long hours are still common in video game houses, particularly in the crunch time to prepare games for the holiday season. The International Game Developers Association is calling on workers to combat a culture of inhuman hours.

Working sick

The pressure to work is so intense, an Australian survey finds, that two-thirds of workers "always" or nearly always come to work when they're sick. Another 20 percent say they "often" work-sick. People are so overworked, they said, that they cannot afford to take a day off.

As a result, illnesses are prolonged and spread to coworkers. The government is cracking down on the problem with legislation allowing employers to demand workers provide a doctor's note for each day they claim paid sick leave. This will enable bosses to go after the 10 percent or so of workers who take their sick time.

Virginia town opens day labor hiring site

The Herndon, Virginia, town council has approved a publicly funded site for day laborers waiting to be hired for construction work, after contentious public hearings. The council was seeking a solution to complaints that day laborers were causing problems as they stood outside a 7-Eleven store.

Residents on both sides of the issue packed the council chambers, and demonstrated outside council chambers. Immigrant workers' families related concerns about human rights at the hearings, defending their need for work. But several residents called for a crackdown on illegal immigration, and said jobs should go to "American" workers.

Having traveled to Virginia during the construction boom seeking work, many immigrants wait for work every morning facing charges of noisemaking, littering and creating a nuisance. Immigrants comprise 38 percent of the population of Herndon.

In response, Project Hope and Harmony proposed a day-labor hiring center at an empty police station. Similar centers have been established in nearby Arlington and Montgomery counties, providing services to the workers and reducing the impact of the shape-ups on neighbors..

National radio talk shows used the Herndon controversy to inflame the debate over immigration. National anti-immigration groups have worked to promote xenophobic sentiments in Herndon. When the town council approved the day labor site, anti-immigrant organizations filed suit. Minuteman organizers trained residents to videotape workers and employers who frequent the hiring sites. By posting names and photos of employers who have hired day laborers on the internet, the Minutemen have sought to organize Herndon residents to report employers and immigrants and scare them away.

The Minutemen have also organized vigilantes around the country to follow immigrants home and report zoning violations or any other legal problems that will get the attention of the INS.

In Houston, the ACLU is using volunteers to monitor Minuteman activity. Other organizations, such as the Coalition Against Intolerance and for Respect in Texas, have trained workers to cope with harassment.

Project Hope and Harmony of Herndon will open the site in November and plan to include training enabling day laborers to defend themselves against confrontation.

Immokalee workers meet with UN poverty expert

Dr. Arjun Sengupta met with the Coalition of Immokalee Workers in a standing-room-only meeting Oct. 26. Dr. Sengupta was there in his capacity as United Nations Independent Expert on Extreme Poverty. His current work entails documenting the severe economic plight of many U.S. communities as part of an effort to challenge the causes and effects of poverty through the U.N. Commission on Human Rights.

Immokalee, Florida, is one of the poorest towns in the United States. The CIW has recently won a four-year boycott against Taco Bell to secure raises for tomato pickers. Begun in 1993, the work of the CIW has centered on organization of and education about southwestern Florida's agricultural workers.

Australian right to strike...

continued from page 1

building industry police force is investigating workers involved in so-called unlawful industrial action. Those hauled before these special tribunals are stripped of basic civil rights such as the right to remain silent.

Will the government's attempt to suppress strikes be effective? Historically unions took protest industrial action to defend the right to strike, recognizing that it is an essential freedom.

Australia started as a penal colony with penal powers against workers acting in unions. Now, in the 21st century, penal powers return, this time in a globalised corporate world. Many point to the legislation as an attempt to "Americanise" labour relations, pushing unions to the margins and leaving workers to fend for themselves.

No choice, no fair go. Will the long tradition of the Australian 'blue' be suppressed? Or will the 'blue' survive?

Transit workers cancel fares

Public transit workers in Melbourne brought 200,000 workers to a Nov. 15 protest over the new legislation, announcing they would not check tickets that morning.

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NYU graduate assistants strike

Graduate teaching assistants set up picket lines in front of Bobst Library, the main New York University administration building, and other sites across the campus Nov. 10. Picketers carried placards comparing NYU to Wal-Mart, and banged drums and buckets.

The strike was called after NYU withdrew recognition and refused to bargain with the Graduate Student Organizing Committee (a United Auto Workers affiliate which won a recognition election a few years ago and whose first contract recently expired) after the NLRB revoked graduate employees' labor law protections. GSOC members were joined on the picket lines by members of Graduate Students Employees United of Columbia University and Yale's graduate student union. A contingent of seventh graders from a nearby school joined the picket in solidarity.

Compared to an August 4 demonstration when 77 were arrested for disorderly conduct, the strike initiation actions were less dramatic. NYU security prevented students from unfurling a union solidarity banner at Skirball Center for the Performing Arts, and city police forced the student supporters back to the rally at Bobst Library.

In response to GSOC's strike threat, NYU administrators offered a deal on wages and benefits August 2, but refused a grievance procedure or a union shop. When the union tried to negotiate over the offer August 4, administrators responded that the 48-hour deadline to respond had run out and ended communication. The next day, 85 percent of GSOC members voted to strike.

GSOC asked graduate teaching assistants to cancel the 165 classes they teach or move them off campus. In solidarity, 400 professors who use TA's agreed to move classes off-campus. Nineteen departments and the Tisch School of the Arts faculty passed resolutions in support of GSOC. But most classes continue to meet, and unionized workers are maintaining college operations.

The NYU administration has sent letters to undergrads' parents with false information about GA salaries, threatened individual strikers, and intruded into an online course support system to monitor teacher-student interactions and lay the groundwork for taking over instruction.

NYU has not docked pay as the *IW* goes to press, and a spokesman said the university has no plan to hire replacement workers. However, according to the *Washington Square News*, the day after the GSOC/UAW contract ran out the university posted a list of available graduate assistant and teaching assistant positions on its website.

New School adjuncts win

Part-time adjunct professors at New School, a private university in Manhattan, reached an agreement with negotiators for Academics Come Together (UAW) Nov. 1. Along with an obligation to find courses for veteran adjuncts to teach should their assignments be cancelled due to low enrollment or curriculum change, adjuncts with the university for more than five years will get increased health care and paid academic leave.

Adjuncts represented by the 2,000-member local received a retroactive increase of $10 an hour with a higher minimum base salary of $25 to $35 an hour. By the end of the four-year contract, adjuncts would receive the same retirement benefits as full timers.



Protesting defense industry

More than 70 people, including members of the Aoteaora Revolutionary Clown Army, protested the Weapons Defense Industry Association Conference in Te Papa, New Zealand, Oct. 18. Twenty were arrested in the action, organized by Peace Action of Wellington, during a sit-in blocking the entrance for two and a half hours. An armored vehicle was also denied entrance. Protesters laid down in front of a tank as it left the complex and were eventually individually removed. Entertaining the crowd of bystanders, clowns made a mockery of attendees and imitated the capitalist defense industry marketeers, as other clowns pretended to attack them.

Maimed by capitalism

My uncle, who is a carpenter, fell off a roof today shattering his wrist and fracturing bones in his face. He was med-flighted to Beth Israel hospital, and is now out of work and injured for life for the boss.

This is just a minor accident in the "first world," horrors many times this are wrought upon our class the world over every day. We must rise up together to crush capitalism and stomp out injustice!

For a world of humans before profit, for a libertarian communist society and the OBU,

— Justin, Boston

Campus Equity Week

The Coalition of Contingent Academic Labor held its third annual Campus Equity Week Oct. 31 – Nov. 4 to call attention to the plight of the part-time faculty who now teach more than half of courses in many colleges.

On some campuses faculty passed out peanuts and held signs saying "What do elephants and adjunct faculty have in common? Both work for peanuts." On others, part-time instructors parked cars filled with textbooks, papers and classroom materials next to signs reading "part-time faculty office."

The American Federation of Teachers placed "help wanted" ads in Vermont newspapers describing adjunct positions. One such ad noted that appointments are "part-time," but opportunities exist to teach full-time schedules at 40 percent or less of full-time pay, with no health care or other benefits.

NLRB rules against newsies

In September 2001, an NLRB administrative law judge decided that newsies – newspaper carriers – are employees, despite the *St. Joseph News-Press*'s insistence that they were independent contractors. The judge ruled that the publisher had violated labor law by discriminating against workers who asked the Teamsters to help them organize, and ordered reinstatement and back pay for newsies who were fired during the campaign.

The *News-Press* then appealed to the national NLRB, which on August 27, nearly five years after the paper smashed the carriers' organizing, reversed the judge and designated the carriers as independent contractors – reasoning that they use and maintain their own vehicles, handle customers directly, and are not directly supervised. A dissenting board member argued that the carriers' dependence on the paper (which collects from most customers, sets routes, and determines the delivery schedule) for compensation, percentage of profit, delivery route, number of customers, and the fact that the publisher can initiate and terminate contracts at will, all indicate that they are employees.

This is the latest in a string of recent decisions in which graduate assistants and disabled employees in other industries have been denied employee status by the NLRB.

Book Review: Dancin' in the streets

BY LEN WALLACE

Dancin' In the Streets: Anarchists. IWWs, Surrealists, situationists & Provos in the 1960s as recorded in the pages of The Rebel Worker & Heatwave, edited by Franklin Rosemont and Charles Radcliffe. Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 2005, 447 pages. Available from IWW Lit Dept., $19.

The opening graphic of *Dancin' In the Streets* features the surrealist art of Tor Faegre with words by Penelope Rosemont proclaiming "The Total Revolution Is Not The Sum Of Its Parts." It sums up what this extraordinary, defiant and imaginative blast of documents from 1964 through 1970 is all about.

By the time I got to university in 1972 the student New Left had already begun to disintegrate, fraction, faction... with quick descent to either self-marginalisation or just being co-opted. Thirty years later my eyes glaze over when I listen to former activists and "radicals" now earning livelihoods built upon government and community grants expectorate about "the Movement." I mentally tune out when I hear, yet one more time, the story of that certain "progressive" union functionary (who back then earned eight times what I earn today) who once showed up to support a Farmworkers lettuce boycott rally. Both types have remained remarkably silent for decades.

Likewise, most histories and documentaries about the Left in the sixties leave me cold. They seem formulaic – the inevitable building of coalitions, the worker-student alliance, the Movement, fights with liberals, social democrats, the fall into sectarianism, who out-Mao'ed the Maoists and who out-Trotskyed the Trots. Far more enticing are the articles, flyers and leaflets published by the insurgents themselves at the time.

Dancin' in the Streets, on the other hand, documents the story of a remarkable group of young men and women of varied working-class backgrounds who began a journey into revolution publishing a mimeographed magazine called *The Rebel Worker* in Chicago and a sister publication *Heatwave* in England. Initially fired up with the hope of rejuvenating the IWW, individual members soon took off in a different trajectory of individual and communal discovery that became a wild, frantic, often erratic and unabandoned journey into a synthesis of libertarian/anarchist/surrealist/marxist criticisms of all moments of commodity society.

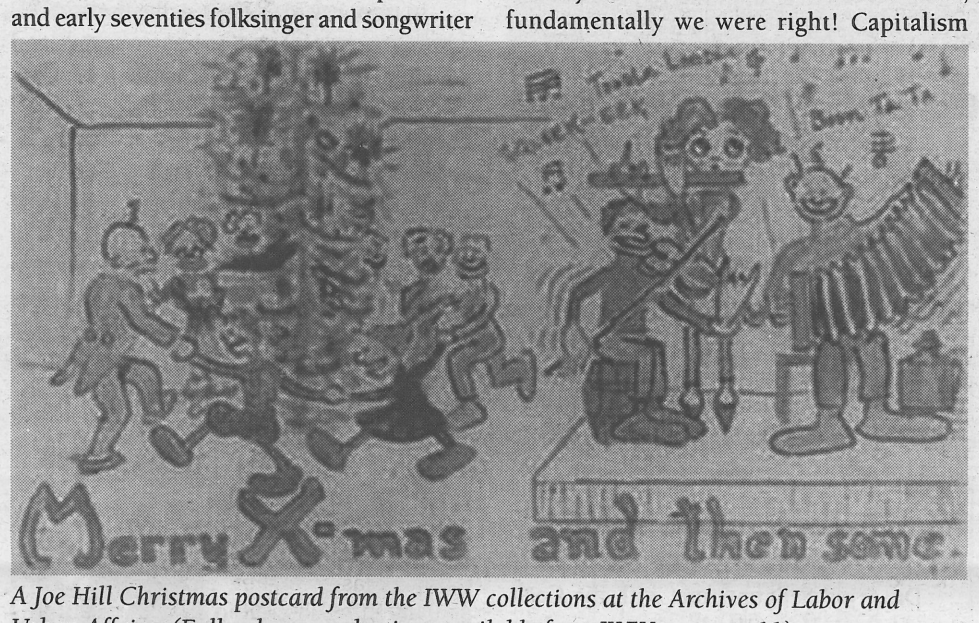
Reading *Dancin' in the Streets* is like reading an adventure of applied Hegelian dialectics – self-movement, motion, development, pressing and going beyond the limits to make leaps in both individual and common action and consciousness. This is a group of people who rightfully see the condition of the world and people's lives as mightily messed up, that only the most radical critiques can set it along a different path.

The revolution was not about building the planned economy, vanguards, etc. It really was about abolishing class and the wage system now, and not in some distant future. The weapons that workers needed were subversive and infectious humour, not correct statements; art, music and poetry, not dogma; self-reliance, not correct leadership. Sixties and early seventies folksinger and songwriter Phil Ochs felt that what the Left needed was a union of Che Guevara and Elvis Presley. These young revolutionaries would most likely advocate a grand synthesis of Marx, Bakunin and Bugs Bunny.

What back then would have been condemned by the dogmatic and orthodox Left as adventurist "infantile disorders" can now, in the wake of the failure of that very same dogmatic and orthodox Left, be seen as sophisticated critiques and insights of capitalism and state capitalism.

The Russian poet Yevgeni Yevtushenko once quipped that the former starters of rebellion's fires have now become the firemen trying to put out the flames. Editors Franklin Rosemont and Charles Radcliffe, who were principle actors within this group, provide an in-depth and heated defense of this movement of the Left far beyond the orthodox Left. Rosemont writes that there is something here to preserve, wonder at, enjoy and learn from. Unlike others they have remained committed to their ideals: "But what really matters, today and tomorrow, is this: However wrongheaded we may have been about this or that detail, fundamentally we were right! Capitalism does stink! The State is oppressive! Revolution is the only solution! Freedom is the only cause worth serving!"

Reading this volume of articles is like holding a firecracker in your fingers, imagining the potential of the big bang if lit. Read it and pass it along. You might light a fuse. We need more works like this to spark people out of their doldrums.



A Joe Hill Christmas postcard from the IWW collections at the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs. (Full-color reproductions available from IWW, see page 11)
Anyone interested in the IWW collection should contact William LeFevre at the Archives at 313-577-2789 or by email at William.LeFevre@Wayne.Edu.

2,225 U.S. children serving life in prison

According to a report by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, 2,225 U.S. children under the age of 18 have been sentenced to life terms without parole. Six of these were under age 13 when convicted, and 16 percent between 13 and 15 when they were sentenced. 59 percent of prisoners convicted as children are serving time without parole.

The 157-page report published by Amnesty and HR Watch, "The Rest of Their Lives: Life Without Parole for Child Offenders in the United States," lists 42 states that have laws sentencing children to life terms without parole. Ten states set no minimum age for sentencing children to life without parole. In 26 states, the LFOP is mandatory for anyone convicted of first degree murder.

Twenty-six percent of those sentenced in this way were convicted of "felony murder," which mandates that anyone involved in carrying out a crime in which someone is killed is considered guilty of murder even if they did not do the killing. The report cites an example of a 15-year-old youth who was sentenced LFOP for stealing the van in which he waited during an attempted robbery, while one of his older brother's two friends murdered two people.

The United States is one of very few countries in the world that utilizes the life without parole sentence. Along with Somalia, the U.S. has refused to sign the international Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Hunger grows in America

Hunger in American households has risen by 43 percent over the last five years. The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that 38.2 million Americans live in households that suffer from hunger and food insecurity, including nearly 14 million children. That figure is up from 31 million Americans in 1999.

Wal-Mart "philanthropies" attack public schools

The Wal-Mart empire philanthropic ventures, the Walton Family Foundation, (WFF), and other Wal-Mart foundations donate more than $100 million a year on average – mostly to faith-based organizations and to opponents of public school education. The Wal-Mart Stores Inc. Political Action Committee for Responsive Government donates a large percentage of its contributions to Republican Party candidates and committees – $2.1 million in 2004.

According to a report published by the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, corporations increasingly donate to influence politics, and the Walton family's influence with nearly 40 percent of the company stock at 4.3 billion shares, equal to over $90 billion, exerts considerable influence.

John Walton, who died in 1992, owned 240,000 shares of Tesseract Group Inc., once known as Education Alternative Inc., a profiteering venture capitalist manager of charter schools. The Walton Family Foundation provides over a million to school "reform" groups, such as the Children's Educational Opportunity Foundation of America, aka Children's First America that received $10.3 million in 2003. The Black Alliance for Education Options was also a major recipient, that promotes the school voucher movement, as was pro-voucher Washington policy marketers, the Goldwater Institute, and the Manhattan Institute of Policy Research.

Upon the death of Helen Walton, widow of Sam Walton, founder of the empire, the WFF will receive an additional $20 billion.

IWW

1905-2005: Celebrating a Century of Revolutionary Industrial Unionism

The First Hundred Years Have Been Great, Here's To A Hundred More

It was a hundred years ago, and things were different then.
The problems that people faced were magnified by ten.
The world spun around on an axis made of gold.
The rich opened their hands to see how much they could hold.
But in Chicago, in 1905, thoughts began to form.
People convened for seven days and their ideas began to storm.
They realized the struggle for the workers would be a lengthy one.
But that doesn't mean the fight couldn't be a lot of fun.

So to my fellow workers in the mines dug in the hills.
And to my sister workers toiling away in the mills.
The centenary's here and reminds us what we're fighting for.
The first hundred years have been great, here's to a hundred more.

It was a hundred years ago, and things began to change.
The bosses could feel it take form, and they felt weak and strange.
Because the fight was on, workers knew the power that they held.
With their collective might, they fought, and some of their visions gelled.
No more would they be divided up like cattle in pens.
They'd agitate, protest, picket, and do it over again.
They could feel the energy in their actions, and so can we.
We will make the world anything that we want it to be.

So to my brothers in the fight against the greedy bosses.
And to my sisters helping us all to cut our losses.
I've enjoyed the time I've spent organizing in this class war.
The first hundred years have been great, here's to a hundred more.

It's been a hundred years, and oh how many lessons we've learned.
So many picket lines marched, and false divisions burned.
The repression they faced was many times worse than it is today.
But they fought back against it, in new and exciting ways.
So come on my friends, sisters, brothers, it's gonna take you all.
But together we'll make the ivory towers of the elite fall.
I can already see the foundations beginning to crack.
With all of us united together, nothing will hold us back.

So to my friends with the same great visions in their eyes.
I'm enjoying this struggle with you to make them realized.
It's time well spent with you, shaking the earth to its core.
The first hundred years have been great, here's to a hundred more.

— X353981

Judge: Killing 13 miners is only minor offense

FROM CONFINED SPACE

On Sept. 23, 2001, two explosions ripped through the Jim Walters mine in Brookwood, Alabama, killing 13 workers, many of whom were trying to assist four co-workers injured in the initial blast. The U.S. Mine Safety and Health Administration fined Jim Walter Resources Inc. $435,000 for major problems. But administrative law judge David F. Barbour reduced the fine to $3,000 Nov. 1, saying the company was guilty only of minor violations. MSHA had accused the company of lacking proper roof supports, improper training and inadequate efforts to prevent the buildup of volatile coal dust and gas.

A study by the United Mineworkers found that the explosions occurred when part of the mine's roof fell on top of and short-circuited a 6-ton scoop battery, generating sufficient heat to ignite methane. The union alleges the roof fall resulted from the mine operator's failure to adequately support the roof. Following the first explosion, four miners were injured and ventilation controls were damaged, allowing methane to build up. Twelve miners who responded to the accident were caught in the second explosion about 55 minutes after the first blast. They all perished along with the previously injured and immobilized miner.

"MSHA's District 11 allowed many violations to languish well after the required abatement dates had passed and kept fines low by, for example, citing that only one miner would be injured or killed by most violations," said UMWA Safety & Health Administrator Joe Main, who led the investigation called for by Roberts. The union concluded that MSHA had ignored miners who complained about the hazardous conditions in the mine.



Wobblies! A Graphic History of the IWW, edited by Paul Buhle & Nicole Schulman

Stories of the hard-rock miners' shooting wars, young Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, the first sit-down strikes and Free Speech fights, the Pageant for Paterson, field-hand revolts and lumber workers' strikes, government prosecutions and mob lynching, Mexican-American uprisings in Baja, IWW songs and more.

Contributors include Carlos Cortez, Harvey Pekar, Peter Kuper (current artist of *Mad*'s Spy vs. Spy), Sue Coe, Seth Tobocman, Chris Cardinale, Ryan Inzana, Spain Rodriques, Trina Robbins, Sharon Rudahl, and the circle of artists for *World War 3 Illustrated.* *256 pages,* **$25.00**

Green Bans, Red Union, Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation
by Meredith and Verity Burgmann

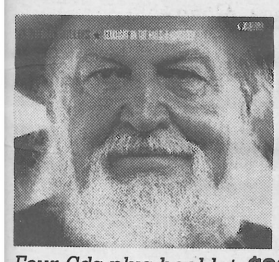
At the height of the Australian building boom in the 1970s a remarkable union campaign stopped billions of dollars worth of indiscriminate development that was turning Australian cities into concrete jungles. Enraging employers and politicians, members of the New South Wales Builders Labourers' Federation risked their jobs in order to preserve buildings, bush and parkland. The direct impact of this "green bans" movement can be seen all over Sydney. *Green Bans, Red Union* documents the development of a union that took direct action on a number of social issues. Apart from the green bans, union members also used their industrial power to support the rights of oppressed groups, such as Aborigines, women and homosexuals. In telling the colorful story that inspired many environmentalists and ordinary citizens, Meredith and Verity Burgmann open an important window on a period when Australian workers led the world in innovative and stunningly effective forms of environmental protest. *352 pages,* **$20.00**

A Troublemaker's Handbook 2: How to Fight Back Where You Work – And Win! edited by Jane Slaughter

This unique resource of organizing and leadership lessons, tactics and strategies is a collaboration of over 70 authors and hundreds of activists. No matter how seasoned an activist you are, this book will suggest new ways to fight back where you work. Chapters include: The Fight Starts at the Workplace, Shop Floor Tactics, Fighting Discrimination, Saving Good Jobs: Fighting Lean Production & Outsourcing, Alliances in the Community, Bringing Immigrants into the Movement, Workers Centers, Leadership Development, and International Solidarity. *378 large format pages,* **$24.00**

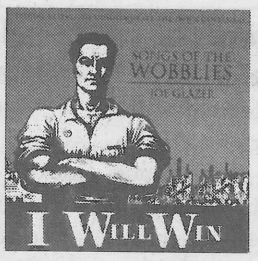
Joe Hill: The IWW and the Making of a Revolutionary Workingclass Counterculture by Franklin Rosemont

"This is no ordinary biography. It is a journey into the Wobbly culture that made Joe Hill and the capitalist culture that killed him. But as Rosemont suggest in this remarkable book, Joe Hill never really dies. He will live in the minds of young rebels as long as his songs are sung, his ideas are circulated, and his political descendants keep fighting for a better day." — Robin D.G. Kelley *639 pages,* **$20.00**



Rebel Voices: 20 IWW songs sung by Wobbly entertainers. **$15.00**

Utah Phillips: Starlight on the Rails Boxed CD Set
This new CD box set contains 63 stories & 61 songs, spanning 40 years of Utah's performing career. *Four Cds plus booklet,* **$38.95**



Joe Glazer: Songs of the Wobblies
Re-released on CD to celebrate our centenary, Joe Glazer's tribute includes 12 songs & a rare recording of IWW organizer, songwriter and illustrator Ralph Chaplin. **$15.00**

Jack Herranen & the Ninth Ward Conspiracy: To Fan the Flames of Discontent A project born from several musicians gathered in New Orleans, this is a soulful and original celebration of IWW song. **$12.00**

Spain In My Heart CD
These songs and performances form a mosaic of surprisingly delicate and moving emotions. The yearning for better times by the Spanish Republican soldiers and their families is portrayed in "Asturias," performed by Guardabarranco, and "En La Plaza De Mi Pueblo" and "Tú Que Brillas," both sung by Michele Greene. Aoife Clancy's version of "The Bantry Girls' Lament" captures the longing for loved ones fighting in Spain from an Irish perspective. "Llegó Con Tres Heridas," written by Spanish poet Miguel Hernández, who died at 31 from tuberculosis he contracted in Franco's political prisons, reminds us that the three most important things in existence are life, love and death – all of equal significance. Illuminated by a 24-page booklet packed with historical notes and archival posters, *Spain* should introduce new generations to a crucial period in danger of being forgotten. 17 tracks, **$15.00**

Harlem Glory
by Claude McKay

Written in the 1940s, this semi-autobiographical novel by the renowned Jamaican poet and novelist evokes the life of Harlem in the Great Depression and New Deal. McKay captures the exuberant clash of social movements and ideologies, acutely sensitive to the vitality and diversity of Black culture and drawing on his experiences in the IWW & the socialist movement. *112 pp.,* **$6.00**

Juice Is Stranger Than Friction: Selected Writings of T-Bone Slim

Working-stiff, hobo and revolutionist, IWW columnist T-Bone created a language all his own to lambast the plutocrats, scissorbills and faddists of his day. Funny, dazzling, and lyrical, T-Bone Slim is as enjoyable today as ever.

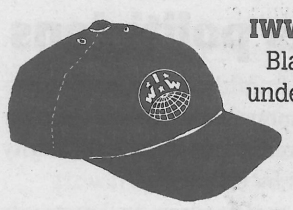
156 pages, **$12.00**

Pyramid of the Capitalist System poster. 17"x22" color repro of the classic graphic **$9.50**



IWW T-shirts
Sabo-cat or globe design, printed on red or black shirt.
Sizes S-XL $15.00
Size XXL $17.00

When ordering, please specify size, design and color shirt (red or black)



IWW Baseball Cap
Black cap with red under visor. Embroidered, one size fits all. **$16.00**



Images of American Radicalism edited by Paul Buhle & Edmund B. Sullivan
A richly illustrated book with 100 color plates (and several black & white as well), including drawings, cartoons, photos, broadsides and posters, campaign pins, sheet music, and every conceivable "image" produced by a host of radical movements from colonial days to the 1990s (including several from the IWW). The images are supplemented by accounts of the events of the period, and sidebars on selected artists. **$20.00**

Joe Hill's Christmas Card
"Merry X-Mas and then some." This card was painted by Joe Hill in 1913 and sent to friends in California. Full color reproduction printed on a blank card, envelope included. A dozen cards and envelopes: **$14.00**



This Land is Your Land (Book and CD)
Since its debut in the 1940s, Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" has become one of the best-loved folk songs in America. Now the classic ballad – the full version – is brought to life in a richly illustrated edition for the whole family to share. Includes a nine-track compact disk. **$10.00**

Bling Blang by Woody Guthrie, with pictures by Vladimir Radunsky A children's song about building a house, boldly and playfully illustrated. Sheet music on reverse side of jacket. (aimed at ages 3-8) **$8.00**

A part of something big

BY J. PIERCE

Going to work is a momentous occasion, even on a normal day. But last Friday I had the pleasure of being a part of something big: There's nothing more thrilling than being *The Inflator.* The bosses call it "Price Changes." But wandering around the aisles scratching off price tags and replacing them with (higher) price tags is actually what I'm doing.

There's a sense of power and purpose in being a part of the global effort to reduce the purchasing power of the wages of the working class. Yesterday, one hour of work changing price tags could buy me $8.50 worth of insect poison, which translates into maybe two bottles. But today, that same $8.50 an hour (in the Bay Area!) will only get me around 1 3/4 bottles of poison.

There is no second clerk wandering the store bumping up mine or your wages. Those remain stagnant. Economists say that this phenomenon has been occurring consistently since the early seventies, if I heard correctly. The real value of our paychecks has been going down, not up. Apparently regi-slaves like me have been wandering the stores attacking our own purchasing power for *decades*!

I like to picture myself as a tiny cog in the vast, and barely fathomable global exchange of goods. I examine and admire the Chinese newspapers, brightly colored paper, and Korean shoe sole scraps crammed in between the pottery that we pull off the trucks. Are these newspapers from Beijing? Or maybe Shanghai? Come to find out they're from San Leandro, California. If their warehouse is similar to our store, there's a truly transnational proletariat cooperating in broken languages to bring these pieces of shit from East Asia to the East Bay.

The "products" are all inscribed with their place of origin. The pots say China and Viet Nam. Yet one can only speculate on the origins of the people who make these items, pack them full of newspaper, ship them across the sea and over the highways – each worker a product and agent of global pressures.

I asked my boss why the prices of the furniture were going up. He replied that the supplier is charging more for anything made of steel. The boss said the Chinese economy is using so much steel that the price of steel is soaring globally. Now given that this guy is management, I take anything he says as a manipulative plot to chisel me on the price of my labor power. Regardless of that fact, what if he's on to something?

What if every time the capitalists feel economic pressure placed on their privileges they attack the working class? Last Friday I was the end of the line of this particular form of attack. Well, at least the customers are mainly Piedmont mansioneers, so the price changes

Sweetheart deal at Wal-Mart

The inspector general of the Department of Labor has faulted the Department for "significant concessions" to Wal-Mart for an agreement to give stores 15 days' notice before DOL investigators inspect them for child labor law violations.

DOL was also accused of including Wal-Mart lawyers, while excluding the Labor Department's legal division, in authoring the $135,540 settlement for federal charges of violations of child labor law in Connecticut, Arkansas and New Hampshire. The violations were against workers under 18 who were operating dangerous machines, such as chain saws and cardboard balers.

In this agreement, the Department of Labor also agreed to give warning before investigating any other claims of failure to pay minimum wage and overtime.

The inspector general criticized the DOL agreement with Wal-Mart for the extent to which it limited the DOL's Wage and Hour Division authority to do investigations or penalize violators.

Although Wal-Mart stores agreed to pay the fines, it did not admit to any wrongdoing in the child labor investigations.

Solidarity Forever

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Icelandic women's strike

Women of Iceland called for a "Women's Day Off" Oct. 24 to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the 1975 walkout in which 25,000 women took the day off.

This year, in Iceland's capital more than 50,000 women stopped working at 2:08 p.m. in order to work 64.15 percent of the day – equal to the percentage of the pay they get compared to male workers.

Women began marching the streets of Reyjavik at 3:00 p.m., loudly demanding equality, then tens of thousands rallied in an overfilled stadium meant to hold 7,000.

Leaving schoolhouses, office buildings, and households behind, they struck for equal wages and respect. Fifty thousand female workers, half the population of Reyjavik, banged pots on the street to send a loud message as they brought businesses, schools, and government offices to a standstill. Similar actions took place across the country.

Eighty percent of women in Iceland work. Since 1975, women holding seats in parliament have increased from 5 to 33 percent. From 1986 to 1996, Iceland had a woman president, Vigdis Finnbogadottir. Now, women on the street are criticizing the cowboy in office, and the low pay in nursing and other professions.

During the Oct. 24 walkout, parliament was closed. Baltic politicians meeting at the Hotel Nordica for the annual Nordic Council felt the absence of many hotel workers.

Compared to U.S. women, Icelandic women fare better, with government-funded health care, childcare, family support, and paid maternity leave.

Women in Iceland, however, earn only 72 percent of men's salaries for the same hours, and one out of three women are victims of gender-related violence. Women in Iceland are still mainly responsible for childcare duties and housework, and work most of the low-paid caretaking and domestic jobs.

Haitian labor group confronts politicians

The well-known Haitian labor group Batay Ouvriye ("Workers' Struggle") is denouncing a slanderous campaign by U.S. supporters of the Lavalas movement of deposed Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

During an International Tribunal on Haiti organized by supporters of the Workers World Party, a panelist charged that Batay Ouvriye had been funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development as part of a scheme to undermine the Aristide government in the months leading up to his ouster.

Batay Ouvriye ridicules the idea that it was part of "an unholy alliance fabricated by the State Department," noting they had a long public record of opposition to "the Lavalas leaders, who we certainly exposed to be reactionaries, swindlers, complete frauds, anti-popular and fundamentally anti-worker."

Among Batay Ouvriye's best-known campaigns were union drives at Grand Marnier and Cointreau plantations in northern Haitian and the recent unionization of a Dominican-owned factory in a "free trade zone" by the Dominican border in Ouanaminthe. During the Ouanaminthe struggle, Batay Ouvriye received $3,500 from the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center, in response to a public appeal for funds to help fired workers. The Solidarity Center is funded by US AID.

Stressing that it focuses on grassroots struggles "against the bourgeoisie concretely in the factories, sweatshops, plantations," Batay Ouvriye asked why the International Tribunal had chosen to target it rather than a number of much less militant Haitian unions that "closely resemble ... the pro-imperialist and pro-bourgeois Confederation of Venezuelan Labor (CTV)," a major force in the 2002 U.S.-backed effort to overthrow Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez and a major recipient of US AID funds.

Batay Ouvriye notes that two of its supporters were killed in northern Haiti in May 2002 by goons led by a local Lavalas mayor. Aristide's government responded to the anti-union violence by arresting several Batay Ouvriye organizers and two journalists; some were held in the National Penitentiary until December 2002, when they were released following an international campaign to press the Lavalas government for their release.

Is AFL-CIO's Int'l Solidarity Center a subsidiary of the U.S. State Department?

BY HARRY KELBER

In 1997, the AFL-CIO established the American Center for International Labor Solidarity to develop international campaigns and cooperative relations with labor federations in other countries.

Solidarity Center replaced the four regional institutes under former President Lane Kirkland , whose staffs, operating in some 80 countries, had been involved with CIA agents to destabilize democratically elected governments in the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Chile, and had undermined indigenous labor movements and governments that were unfriendly to American business interests.

But a well-kept secret about Solidarity Center is that it receives 90 percent (nearly $30 million) of its annual revenue from U.S. government agencies, and less than 2 percent ($600,000) from the AFL-CIO.

Why does the State Department and other government agencies lavish such huge sums of money on the AFL-CIO, which is otherwise under constant attack by the Bush administration? While Solidarity Center keeps its relations with the U.S. government secret, it surely must supply some payback to the government for the millions of dollars it receives. The State Department is not known for its zeal in promoting international labor solidarity, so it must demand other services.

With its federal subsidies, Solidarity Center is able to maintain offices and staff in at least 26 countries. The strong impression is that Solidarity Center is in these countries to act as the eyes and ears of the U.S. State Department and to manipulate their labor movements in behalf of American government policies and corporate interests.

The Center's role in the attempted overthrow of the democratically elected president of Venezuela, Hugo Chávez, is an embarrassing example. The Center won't tell us how it operates in other countries. Aren't we entitled to know?

No one takes seriously the Center's wildly exaggerated claims about its accomplishments. An example: "The Solidarity Center is preventing and resolving conflicts worldwide by breaking down race and class barriers, building relations that can bridge ethnic and racial divides, and providing training and education that give workers needed job skills and the opportunity for a better future."

Although Solidarity Center has operated for eight years, only a tiny fraction of American workers have ever heard of it and what it does. We have no idea of what deals it has worked out with the Bush administration, because although it acts in our name it keeps all of its operations secret.

The situation at Solidarity Center is a scandal waiting to explode. Before that happens, there ought to be a full-fledged investigation that would investigate its funding, its relation to government agencies, and how it has helped American labor and promoted international labor solidarity.

I have written AFL-CIO President John Sweeney and the six newly elected trustees of the Solidarity Center to raise these issues. I'm hoping they'll support an investigation.

World Labor Solidarity

A COLUMN BY THE INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY COMMISSION

Five Saqez, Iran, labor leaders sentenced to jail

Five workers arrested at a May Day celebration in the city of Saqez on May 1, 2004, have been sentenced to prison terms ranging from two to five years on charges of congregating to undermine national security. Evidently, the Iranian regime is so insecure that for workers to organize their own May Day events independently of the official labor organization poses a serious threat.

Two other workers were acquitted. The convicted labor activists are Mahmoud Salehi, Jalal Hosseini, Mohsen Hakimi, Borhan Divangar and Mohammad Adipour.

Support worker-run hotel

The movement of worker-run businesses in Latin America continued to grow, creating dignified, democratic jobs in the rubble of neoliberalism's ruinous experiments. Now workers at Buenos Aires' four star Hotel Bauen, recovered by its workers after the owners abandoned it to bankruptcy, has now been slated for eviction by politicians, apparently offended by the sight of workers making a success of enterprises the capitalists could not sustain. Workers are urging supporters to sign an online petition: www.petitiononline.com/bauen/petition.html

Protest "Operation Dragon"

The IWW International Solidarity Commission has written Colombian President Uribe, expressing deep concern over the reports of the "Operation Dragon" campaign of intimidation and death threats against Colombian human rights advocates and labor leaders. "The death threats, in the form of a sufragio, are a part of disturbing pattern of such activity in Colombia that serve to stand your nation as the most hostile in the world toward labor activists...

"We stand with SINTRAEMCALI, SINTRAUNICOL and others... When our Fellow Workers are in danger, we cannot be at peace, for their injury is inflicted on us all. Colombia's government must act now to stop this latest aggression against innocent citizens."

The World Series and the $27 baseball cap

The ISC issued this statement on the eve of the 2005 World Series: "Behind the obvious joy of the triumph of one of the great traditions of the sports world is Major League Baseball's refusal to acknowledge the concerns of many of its fans and the demands of activists decrying the use of sweatshop labor to aid baseball's cash cow – licensed logo team clothing which has become an industry all to itself for the players, owners and league officials.

"Perhaps no more obvious an affront to human rights and labor activists is the constant sight of the team logo caps at the ballpark, on the streets and in our children's schools. Take the Pittsburgh Pirates team logo cap, for instance. ... At PNC Park there are two identical fitted caps that both cost $27. One is made by New Era in Upstate N.Y., the other is made by "American Needle" in Bangladesh. The workers are paid $11 in N.Y. and 13 cents (per hour) in Bangladesh, the amount of money that workers make is simply not reflected in retail prices.

"This amounts to nothing more than price gouging directly on the backs of the workers. Every penny they take away from workers is going directly into profits ... there is no fair playing field, baseball is collaborating with sweatshop bosses to steal from some of the poorest people on earth."

Belgium hit by 2nd general strike over retirement age

The trains were one of the few industries operating Oct. 28, as workers kept them running in order to carry tens of thousands of workers to protest marches in the Belgian capital, Brussels. This was the second general strike called to protest government plans to raise the state retirement age from 58 to 60.

Unions note the problem is not that workers are retiring too early, but rather that many employers dump older workers in an attempt to cut costs. The government has refused to negotiate the issue with unions.

Siberian oil workers organize

Oil workers in Siberia's Khanty-Mansy autonomous region are trying to organize a union in response to wages that have been stuck (in inflation-adjusted terms) for 10 years while oil production and profits have skyrocketed. Recently their employer paid out a billion dollars US in dividends.

So workers organized a union, as is their legal right under Russian law. Slavneft managers responded by firing union activists, evicting the head of the union and his family from their apartment, and refusing to negotiate.

Chinese furniture strike

Nearly 3,000 workers at the Italian sofa factory "DeCoro" in Shenzhen went on strike in October to protest the beating of three co-workers by Italian supervisors. The violence occurred after workers confronted managers over being shorted on their pay checks.

Workers marched from the factory, shouting "Stop violence, restore justice and protect our human rights" until they were dispersed by riot police armed with shields and clubs.

Management has written the beaten workers, inviting them to return to work.

Swedish metro workers strike over sacking of union chair

Workers in the Stockholm metro transit system are striking Nov. 18 to protest the sacking of Per Johansson, chairman of the metro drivers' union for alleged disloyalty toward the company and rudeness to managers. Workers believe the firing is in retaliation for his support of rank-and-file struggles over safety.

The union's elected safety controllers have used their power to stop trains on three occasions after severe incidents. When the company refused to address the problems, Johansson went public.

Since the sacking the metro drivers' union has convened weekly meetings for its enraged members. In Sweden unions are tied up by contracts that prohibit strikes.

Nevertheless, the metro drivers went on an unauthorised strike on the morning of Oct. 6, stopping most trains during the morning rush hour while workers protested in front of the main office of Connex Sweden, which operates the Stockholm metro.

About 2,000 workers joined another protest Oct. 20; the Nov. 18 strike will shut down the metro for 24 hours, sending a clear signal to the bosses that operations will not return to normal until Johansson is reinstated.

Yemen: Journalists beaten for covering workers' protest

Two journalists were beaten by police Oct. 29 for reporting on a peaceful demonstration by textile workers in the capital of Sana'a over unpaid wages.

Al-Arabiya cameraman Mojib Soueileh is hospitalized and is suffering from three broken ribs and internal bleeding. The Journalists' Syndicate says such attacks are increasingly common.